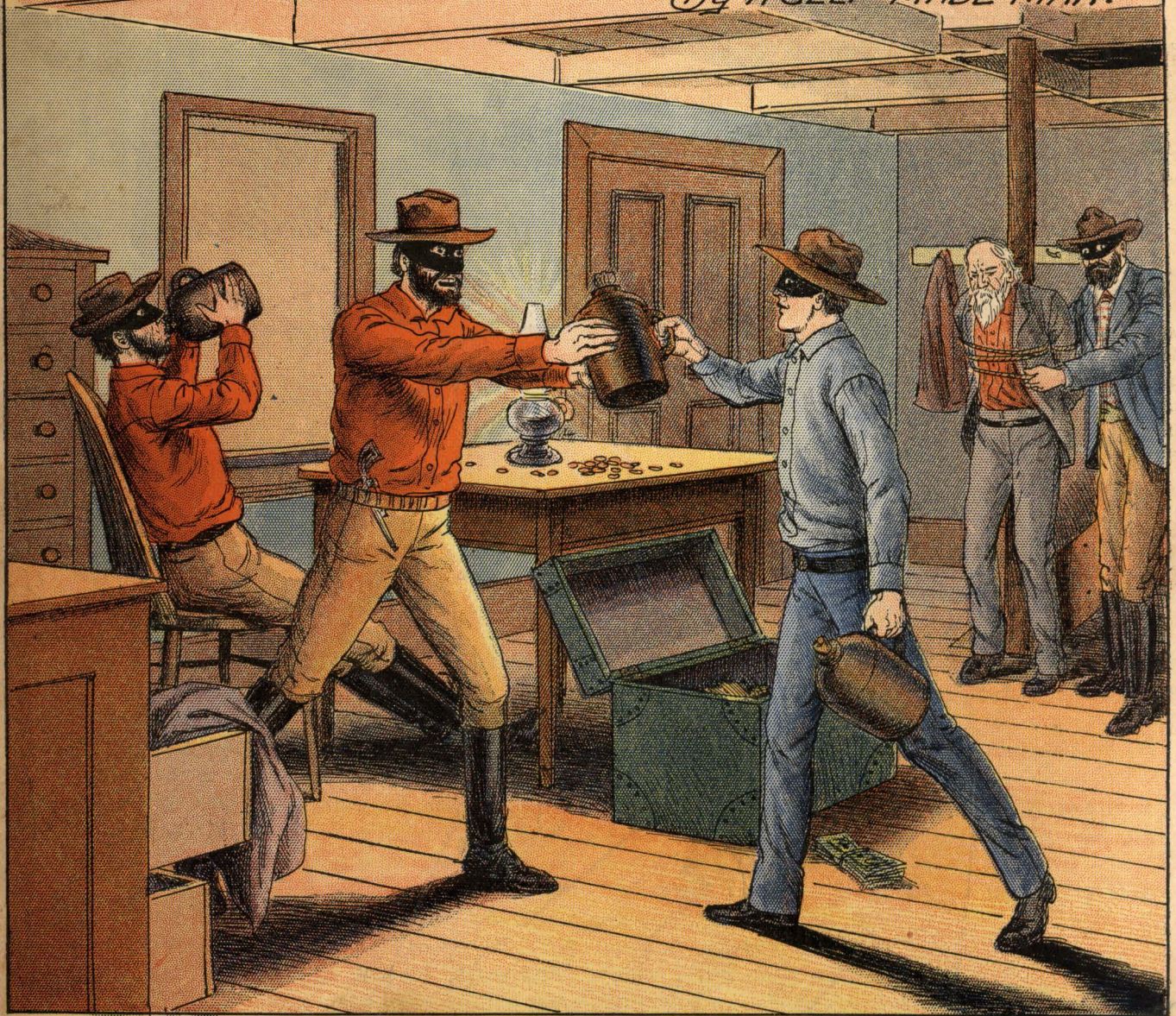


FAME ^{AND} FORTUNE WEEKLY.

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

A ROLLING STONE; OR THE BRIGHTEST BOY ON RECORD.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.



Having secured Matthew Scraggs to a post in the rear of the room, the ruffians ordered Paul to bring forward the demijohns of liquors from the shelf in the corner. Then they proceeded to make merry over their rich haul.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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A ROLLING STONE;

OR,

THE SMARTEST BOY ON RECORD.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCES PAUL SCOTT AND HIS COMPANION, TOBY TITMARSH.

"Wake up, Toby; I see the lights of San Luis straight ahead!" exclaimed Paul Scott.

The speaker, a stalwart, good-looking boy of seventeen, whose bright eyes and shrewd, alert expression showed that he was above the average in smartness, was driving a strong young mare, attached to a small covered wagon, along a dusty road within sight of the Pacific Ocean.

A prolonged snore was the only response that came from his companion—an uncommonly fat youth, of perhaps fifteen, whose open mouth, pudgy nose, and small eyes were almost lost in the fleshy folds of an enormous pair of cheeks that gave his countenance the appearance of a full moon—who occupied two-thirds of the seat, his head propped against the front hoop of the van, and his senses steeped in a profound repose.

"Gee whiz!" muttered Paul, regarding the fat boy with a grin, "how that chap can sleep! I never saw his equal at it. For sleeping and eating he can hold the medal. Wake up, Toby; wake up, I say!" and he nudged his companion in the ribs.

A short, hideous grunt, ending in a long drawn out whistle, came from the fat boy's nose.

"Don't you want something to eat, Toby?" roared Paul in his ear.

The snoring stopped all of a sudden, one eye opened, then the other; finally the fat boy sat up and gazed around him into the dusk which was closing in upon the landscape.

"I thought I heard somebody say dinner was ready," he squeaked, a wistful, hungry look shining from his eyes.

"You must have been dreaming," chuckled Paul, as he chirruped to the mare.

"Maybe I was; but it sounded awful real," replied the boy, smacking his lips.

"Toby Titmarsh," said Paul, solemnly, "if ever there is a post-mortem examination of you I know what the coroner will find inside of you."

"What will they find?" asked Toby, with a look of mild wonder.

"A wolf—maybe two of them."

"Oh! I hope not."

"Are you really hungry again?" snickered Paul.

"Ain't I always hungry?"

"Yes, that's a fact. I don't think I ever heard you admit that you had enough. Do you see those lights ahead?"

Toby rubbed his little round eyes and looked.

"Sure I see them."

"That's San Luis."

"We'll have supper soon, won't we?" eagerly.

"I'm thinking we will."

"That's fine. I'm awful hungry. I could eat——"

"A nice juicy steak with plenty of gravy and other fixings, eh?"

"Don't, Paul; you make my mouth water."

"With a cup of coffee and a slice of pie."

"A slice—a little measley slice—I could eat a whole pie, as big around as that," and the fat boy illustrated by drawing an imaginary circle in the air that answered to the circumference of a fair-sized wash-bowl.

"You've got the healthiest appetite for a small boy I ever saw. It's a wonder you wouldn't get fat," he grinned.

"I thought I was kind of fat," said Toby, looking down at his body, which filled the larger part of the seat.

"Oh, no, you aren't fat. You're only obese."

"What's that?"

"A person is obese when he has an excessive accumulation of adipose tissue," chuckled Paul.

"Have I an excessive accumulation of adipose tissue?"

"Well, rather. You must weigh nearly 200 pounds."

"I don't know. I tried to get weighed the other day in Los Angeles, but the man said I broke his scales."

"He said that, did he?"

"He did, really," replied Toby, innocently.

"Why didn't you go down to the market where they scrape fish and stand on the scales. You couldn't break them."

"What good would that do?"

"You could have given yourself away," chuckled Paul.

Toby didn't see the joke, and he wondered how the scales of the fish would have told him how much he weighed.

And while he was wondering they reached the outskirts of San Luis and drove into that town.

Paul had the name of a cheap hotel, and he asked a passer-by to direct him to it.

In fifteen minutes they arrived in front of the hostelry, and Paul descended from his perch and went in to arrange for a square meal for himself and his companion.

Then he led the wagon into a small yard, gave the mare a drink, tied a bag of oats around her nose, and leaving her to the enjoyment of her evening meal he led Toby into the washroom, where they tidied themselves up a bit before they marched into the dining-room.

A red-cheeked young woman waited on them when they took their places at the table.

The bill of fare consisted of fried Spanish mackerel, a small steak, boiled potatoes, coffee, and pie.

"Is that all the pie I get?" asked Toby, anxiously, gazing down at a very small piece upon his plate.

"Isn't that enough?" snickered Paul.

"Enough!" gasped the fat boy. "Why, there's only two bites in that."

"I'm afraid that's all you'll get, unless I buy you a whole one."

"Do," said Toby, imploringly. "I'll eat it in the wagon."

"All right," replied Paul, good-naturedly. "I'll see if I can get one."

Toby Titmarsh was only half satisfied when he left the table.

There was a dreadful void in his stomach that only a whole pie would satisfy, and fortunately for him Paul succeeded in purchasing the much-desired article.

He mounted to the seat and began to devour it at a rapid rate as the boss of the outfit drove out of the hotel yard and up to the principal street in the town.

The wagon was stopped in the busiest section of San Luis, a couple of naphtha torches were stuck into sockets at the rear of the van, the back of which was let down, and propped up from underneath, thus forming a platform.

Paul brought from the interior of the wagon a box containing small vials and little round tin boxes and placed it on the front of the platform, then he fetched out a couple of stools, and called Toby, who made his appearance with black face and hands, a wig, a huge collar and checked shirt, and a pair of immensely long shoes.

He had a pair of bones in his hands and he made a most comical negro artist.

Paul himself produced a banjo, tuned up, and then the pair launched into an old-time darkey quickstep.

Quite a number of persons had already gathered about the van, but the music soon attracted a crowd.

After Paul had rendered an old plantation ditty in good style, which the spectators roundly applauded, he proceeded to business.

"Gentlemen," he began, taking a bottle with a gaudy label from the box before him, "I have here some of my celebrated Elixir of Life, manufactured by myself, and I alone know the secret of it. This Elixir is two bits a bottle. Taken internally, it's a sure cure for coughs, colds, sore throat, sprain of the vocal organs, and like ills too numerous to mention, a catalogue of which will be found on the wrapper. Full directions are printed on the label, and I can guarantee perfect satisfaction, or the money will be cheerfully refunded. This gentleman takes a bottle. Thank you, sir. Who'll take another bottle? Thank you, sir. You say you want two bottles? Four bits, please. No, sir; there's no discount, not even if you want a dozen bottles. I'm practically giving this stuff away at the price. Some of the materials used in the manufacture of this peerless cough mixture are controlled by the Drug Trust, which greatly reduces the profit on the article. The Glass Trust has lately raised the tariff on the bottles, while the Cork Trust—but there, gentlemen, you all know what cormorants the trusts are. They are the bane of this country. If you come a little nearer, sir, I will be able to hand you a bottle. Thank you, sir. Who's next? You, sir? Certainly. Will it cure toothache? No, sir, I am sorry to say that it will not. This is a lung balsam, not a lotion for the teeth. Have you a toothache? Step right up on the plat-

form and I will endeavor to relieve you in three shakes of a lamb's tail, and it won't cost you a cent. Take a seat on that stool. Now, sir, open your mouth and point out the diseased molar."

Paul took a piece of cotton and a bottle of laudanum from his pocket, which he had been using himself, and wetting the cotton pressed it into the decayed tooth.

In a moment or two the man said he believed the tooth felt better.

"I'm glad to hear it, sir. I dare say that in half an hour the pain will be all gone. You wish to take a bottle of my Elixir? Don't open it until you have occasion to use it, and follow directions carefully. No, I do not guarantee that it will cure consumption. If I could make an Elixir that would master that disease my fortune would soon be made. Who wishes another bottle? Sold again and got the money."

Paul sold a dozen or fifteen bottles of his cough mixture and then the demand for it ceased.

He took up his banjo and he and Toby played another air.

"Now, gentlemen," Paul said once more, taking up one of the small, round tin boxes, "I have here an infallible remedy for corns, bunions, warts, and other excrescences of a similar kind. One bit a box. Complete directions how to apply it to the affected part are printed on the cover. One dime, ten cents, secures the wonderful remedy of which I am the sole inventor and proprietor. It succeeds where other remedies fail. No, sir, it does not remove moles or birthmarks, but it's sure death to corns and bunions. Who'll take a box? Thank you, sir. Who comes next? Wrap up three boxes for that gentleman. Yes, sir, you save a nickel when you take three boxes at one time. Don't be afraid to buy this salve, gentlemen. It will keep for a year at least, if not exposed to the air. If you haven't a corn or bunion now you may have one six months from now, and then how handy it will be to have this wonderful preparation on hand to use. Step right up. Don't be bashful. If you miss this chance to get the only sure-pop remedy for corns and bunions you may have reason to regret it at a future time. Wrap up three more boxes, Toby. The gentleman with the light hat takes them."

For an hour and a half the bystanders were alternately entertained and importuned to purchase the salve and the Elixir of Life.

Then the street began to grow deserted and Paul shut up shop for the night.

The covered wagon was driven into a vacant lot, the mare taken out of the shafts and tethered near-by, and the two boys retired to rest inside the van.

CHAPTER II.

HELD' UP.

Paul Scott was a sort of rolling stone.

He made a living and was accumulating profit by traveling from town to town selling his throat and lung balsam,

and his infallible remedy for corns and bunions—both of which he and Toby manufactured themselves from reliable prescriptions, and which, as a rule, proved beneficial when taken according to the printed directions accompanying the article.

He had been following this vocation for nearly a year, the death of his mother, his only surviving parent, having thrown him upon the world to hoe his own way.

Paul, though often flowery and liberal with his words, was always perfectly honest with the public, and had no fear of retracing his route at any time.

At the present time he was touring southern California, working northward toward San Francisco, and thus far had been quite successful since leaving San Diego.

They had spent a week in Los Angeles, where they did a smashing business in both remedies, and were obliged to manufacture a fresh supply.

Paul had picked up Toby Titmarsh in San Diego.

The fat boy was an orphan, too.

Since the death of his uncle, with whom he had lived, and for whom he had helped tend a small stationery store, Toby had encountered hard luck until he ran across Paul Scott.

Just why Paul took a fancy to the youth he couldn't explain, but he hired the lad for a small wage and his keep, and Toby in return became his faithful and willing helper.

Paul fitted him out, taught him to play the bones pretty well, and was delighted to find that when blacked up the fat youth made quite a hit as a negro minstrel.

His appearance in burnt cork, and ridiculous attire, was irresistibly comic.

Whenever he opened his mouth he couldn't help saying something that amused the crowd, so that on the whole he proved a valuable addition to Paul's business.

Next morning early Paul hitched up and drove to the hotel for breakfast, after which he stationed the wagon at a prominent corner and continued to advertise and dispose of his balsam and corn cure until noon.

After dinner they took to the road again en route for San Bruno, a small coast town a few miles to the northward.

Three rough-looking men on horseback left San Luis at the same time and jogged along the road behind them.

An hour passed and the horsemen maintained the same distance behind the wagon.

There was nothing singular in this.

Paul, however, didn't fancy the general appearance of the strangers.

The road passed over a low spur of the mountain range beside which they were journeying, before reaching San Bruno, and Paul had heard in San Luis that a gang of bandits, whose retreat was supposed to be in these mountains, had been holding up travelers along the highroad and robbing dwellings on the outskirts of the neighboring towns.

"Do you see those three horsemen behind us, Toby?"

asked Paul, as the road began to leave the vicinity of the shore and curve upward into the range.

Toby twisted his chubby face around the outside of the front hoop supporting the canvas covering of the van and looked backward along the highway.

"Sure I see them," he answered.

"Do you know, I don't like their looks," said Paul, seriously.

"What's the matter with them?"

"They don't look honest to me."

"Oh, lor', do you think they mean to rob us?" gasped Toby, putting his hand in his pocket where his few dollars in savings were.

"They look capable of doing 'most anything for the sake of money. They've been following us ever since we left San Luis."

Toby's eyes began to start from their sockets in fear.

"I noticed one of those chaps—the fellow with the smooth face—in the crowd last night when we were doing such a rushing business. I also noticed him hanging around the different corners where we held forth this morning. Then the three of them took dinner at the hotel when we did, and when we drove out of the yard I saw them having their horses saddled. We wasn't a great way down the street before I noticed them jogging along behind the van, and they've been there ever since, though it's nearly three hours since we left San Luis. They may mean nothing, but I'm going to look out for them just the same, for their actions strike me as suspicious."

"You've got a bag of money, Paul. Where can you hide it?"

"I've got it hidden already where I don't think they'll look for it."

"I wish you'd put my money with it," said Toby, anxiously.

"How much have you got about you?"

"I don't know. I'll count it."

Toby found that he had about twelve dollars, all but a five-dollar piece in loose silver.

He liked to carry it that way in his pocket so he could rattle it occasionally.

The jingle of the silver sounded pleasant to his ears.

Its loss he would have regarded as an irreparable misfortune.

"Give me your money, all but a dollar, and hold the reins," said Paul.

Then he stepped over the seat into the body of the van and for the next few minutes he was busily occupied in placing Toby's wealth in his secret receptacle which he had provided for just such an emergency.

He peeked out through the slit in the back canvas at the horsemen and saw that they had come a trifle closer than before.

He resumed his seat and the reins once more.

"How long before we'll get to San Bruno?" asked Toby, nervously.

"If nothing happens we ought to reach the town in an hour."

"It's awful lonesome up here in the hills," gurgled the fat boy.

They had now been out of sight of the ocean for fifteen minutes.

"It isn't very lively, that's a fact," agreed Paul. "We haven't seen many houses since we lost sight of San Luis."

"Are those men still behind us?" asked Toby, in shaky tones.

"They were a moment ago."

"They could rob us here and nobody would know a thing about it," he gasped.

"They couldn't select a better place to do such a thing," replied Paul, coolly.

"Do you think they will?"

"How do I know what their intentions toward us are? We've got to take our chances."

"They might shoot us."

"I don't think they'll do that. However, they couldn't miss you if they tried," with a grin.

"Oh, lor', don't talk that way; you make me nervous."

"Pshaw! Brace up! If those chaps mean to hold us up we've got to face the music, and get out of it as best we can. I don't imagine they can have any use for my Elixir of Life, or my patent corn and bunion cure. If they want anything it is money, and I don't think they'll find much of that in this outfit."

They came to a level stretch and Paul started the mare on at a lively pace.

Presently they heard the clattering of horses' hoofs behind.

Nearer and nearer came the sound until it was close behind, then suddenly the horsemen dashed up on either side of the wagon, one of them spurting ahead and grabbing the mare by the bridle rein.

The speed of the van was checked, while a tall, bearded fellow, yanking an ugly-looking revolver into view, called on Paul to rein in.

He seemed to be the leader of the three rascals, and he spoke in a way that showed that he meant to be obeyed.

"What's this mean?" demanded Paul, resolutely, while Toby collapsed completely, and fell back into the van like a sack of corn.

"Get down!" replied the bearded ruffian, threatening the boy with his weapon at full cock.

The wagon was now at rest in the middle of the road.

Paul decided that the easiest way was the best in dealing with these rascals, so he stepped down into the road.

"Throw up your hands!" cried the leader again.

Paul obeyed.

The smooth-faced man dismounted and approached him.

"Search him!" commanded the leader.

The fellow did it pretty thoroughly, and found something less than three dollars in silver change.

"Where do you keep your money?" demanded the leading ruffian. "Answer me, or I'll put a ball into you."

"Where it's safe," replied Paul, calmly. "I heard in San Luis that there was some chance of our being held up before we reached San Bruno, so I took care not to risk what little money I had made on this road. Uncle Sam will see that it reaches San Francisco before we get there."

The man uttered a roar.

"Search the wagon, Noach!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "Pull that other chap out into the road."

The man addressed as Noach leaped on the dashboard and tore the canvas flap aside.

Then he reached down and grabbed the trembling Toby by the collar.

"Come out of there, you young pig!" he roared. "Come out, or I'll tickle your ribs with my bowie."

Toby emerged, his face as white as chalk, and shaking as with the palsy.

As he stepped out on the dashboard the man gave him a push and the fat boy took a header into the hard road, where he rolled over and lay quite still, as though stunned by the shock.

"That's no way to treat a harmless boy," remonstrated Paul, indignantly.

"Shut up!" answered the leader, in an ugly tone.

Noach searched the van from end to end, but he found only some boxes containing bottles of cough syrup and little round tin boxes of salve, a couple of straw mattresses, which he ripped to pieces with his bowie knife, some bed-clothes, a small trunk, the contents of which he hastily dumped out and scattered around pell-mell; a couple of stools, a banjo hanging against the side of the van, a few paper-covered books, a bound volume of medical recipes, and various other odds and ends of no value to any one but the owner.

The one thing he was in quest of—namely, money—he did not find, and he so reported to the impatient man on horseback outside.

"Have you pulled everything to pieces in there?" he demanded.

"Everything. I ripped the bed to bits, but there isn't a penny in sight."

"You might have saved yourself all that trouble," said Paul. "I told you that I wasn't fool enough to risk my money on this road when there's a safer way to send it ahead."

The leader looked disappointed and he swore roundly.

"Bind that boy's hands behind him and chuck both of those chaps into the wagon," he said.

Paul's hands were secured and he was lifted into the van.

Noach regarded Toby as too big a lift for him to tackle unaided, so he called to the man at the mare's head to dismount and help him.

Toby was then bundled into the van without ceremony.

Noach grabbed the reins, the other man took his horse by the bridle, and, preceded by the leader, they turned off the road a short distance further on and penetrated the silent fastnesses of the range.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH PAUL SCOTT BECOMES A BANDIT.

The party left the road far behind them and headed for the heart of the range.

It was rocky traveling for the wagon, which pitched from one side to the other like a water-logged craft in a heavy sea.

Noach didn't seem to regard his job as driver of the van as a sinecure, for he swore every time the wheels gave a jolt and he received an unpleasant bounce on the seat.

As for Paul and Toby, they had an unpleasant time of it inside.

The fat boy recovered his senses soon after the wagon left the road, and the shaking up that he was presently subjected to called forth a variety of complaints from him.

"Quit your kicking, Toby," said Paul, after listening to him in silence for a short time. "Be thankful you're alive and not bound like me."

Toby hadn't noticed that his companion's hands were secured behind his back, and he now regarded Paul's predicament with some astonishment.

"What did they tie you for?" he asked in an unsteady tone.

"To keep me out of mischief, I suppose," grinned Paul.

"They nearly killed me, chucking me headforemost down into the road," groaned Toby, feeling his sore head tenderly.

"It was a brutal act," said Paul. "And I would have taken it out of that fellow's hide if I had been in a position to tackle him."

"Where are they taking us to, Paul?"

"How can I tell? From the jolting we're getting we must be traveling up into the hills."

Toby tried to look out through the rear opening, when the wagon gave a sudden lurch and he was thrown all in a heap among the stuff which littered the bottom of the wagon.

"Oh, oh!" he howled. "I believe I have broken my jaw."

"Not so bad as that, I guess, Toby," answered Paul, reassuringly. "Your jaws are too well padded with fat to be easily dislocated."

"I'll bet I've swallowed a tooth, then."

"What makes you think so?"

"I'm spitting blood."

"What did you hit your face against?"

"I don't know what I hit it against."

Then came another heavy jolt and an oath from the driver.

"Wow!" roared Toby, who had jabbed his nose against the edge of one of the boxes containing the medicine.

After an hour's ride the wagon reached a narrow opening in the hills of a width just sufficient to permit it to pass through without rubbing against the rocks.

This defile, which had all the curves of a snake, admitted the party to a small amphitheater-like retreat in the range.

The rocks rose hundreds of feet all around, shutting in the place on every side.

The only object that relieved the absolute wildness of the spot was an old weather-scarred adobe house, of a single story, whose tiled roof, once a bright brick red, was now a dirty, faded brown.

It had originally been erected by some Mexican fully one hundred years before.

The wagon was drawn up in front of the door and the four horses turned loose to feed on the rich herbage with which the spot abounded.

"Come, now, get out of that, both of you!" roared Noach, sticking his head up over the seat.

"Go on, Toby," said Paul, "and I'll follow you. Be as lively as you can or that chap may treat you to another tumble."

Toby had experienced all the tumbles he wanted for that day at least, and he got out of the wagon as fast as he could.

As he went out backward the seat of his trousers presented such a tempting mark that Noach fetched him a rap with the whip he held in his hand.

Toby gave a dismal howl and slipped down in the grass.

"What did you do that for?" he whimpered, for the lash had stung him like a hornet's tail.

"Haw, haw, haw!" laughed Noach and the other man, whose name was Kettler.

Paul, who was following his helper, saw the whole thing, and his eyes flashed.

He didn't say a word, for he knew remonstrances would be useless, but he hoped he would get the chance to repay the rascal for his brutal conduct toward the inoffensive fat boy.

"Get up out of that!" cried Noach, flicking the whip about Toby's ears.

Toby got up as fast as his weight would permit him.

The boys were marched into the house and secured in an inner room, which had only a narrow opening in one of the walls for a window.

Entrance and exit could only be had through the main room in front occupied by the three rascals.

Noach immediately began to prepare supper.

They had brought a considerable supply of food from San Luis in their capacious saddle-bags, together with several suspicious-looking flasks that evidently contained whiskey.

They talked in loud, rough tones, and the two boys easily heard all they said.

Toby was all broke up, and his full-moon countenance showed every symptom of distress.

His head hurt him, his jaw pained him, and his back bothered him.

It was clear he wasn't accustomed to rough handling, and Paul felt sorry for him.

But as soon as the appetising smell of bacon and eggs was wafted into their prison, Toby instantly forgot all his ills and began to smack his lips hungrily.

"Doesn't that smell good?" he remarked to Paul.

It certainly did, and Paul was forced to admit the pleasant fact.

"Do we get some?" asked the fat boy, eagerly.

"Probably."

Toby applied his eye to a hole in the door, and greedily followed the movements of the cook.

He saw the bacon and eggs, done to a turn, dished out on the rude table on a porcelain dish, and the sight made him ravenously hungry.

If the rascals had only provided themselves with a nice juicy pie the fat boy would probably have had a fit as he watched the bandits devour the spread.

When the last egg and the last piece of bacon had been transferred to the plate of the leader, who was addressed as Murdock, Toby collapsed on the floor, for all his bright anticipations of supper seemed to vanish like dew before the morning sun.

"It's all gone," he said in heartbroken tones, turning toward Paul, who had been trying to figure out the situation.

"What's all gone?" asked Paul, looking at him.

"The eggs, and the bacon, and the bread and everything. They've cleaned the plates and we're not going to have a thing to eat."

"Oh, I guess they'll give us something."

But Toby shook his head in a melancholy way.

"Look and see for yourself," he said, pointing to the hole in the door.

Paul walked over and peered through into the next room.

The three ruffians had filled their pipes and were enjoying a smoke.

"You'd better cook something for those young chaps in the room," said Murdock, jerking his thumb over his shoulder. "They must be hungry by this time."

So Noach cooked a couple of eggs and some more bacon, and the sizzling sound and its accompanying smell penetrated to the room, and Toby's courage revived.

"Brace up, Toby," grinned Paul. "He's cooking our supper now."

The fat boy could hardly believe the good news until he looked into the room and saw what was going on at the stove.

Presently the door was opened, Paul was unbound and they were told to sit up to the table and help themselves.

There was coffee enough left in the pot to supply them with a full cup each, and it didn't take Toby long to clean up his share of everything in sight.

When Paul had finished, Murdock came up to the table.

"What's your name, young feller?" he asked.

"My name is Paul Scott."

"Well, look here. I'm goin' to make you a proposition. We've got a little affair on hand for to-night, and we want a chap of about your size to help us out. There's a lot of boodle in it, and if you'll j'ine us we'll give you a share of it, more than you'll make in a year sellin' that medicine stuff, and termorrer mornin' we'll let you take yer wagon and go. What d'ye say?"

"Suppose I refuse?" asked Paul.

"We'll tie you two chaps up and leave you here and do the job alone. As we don't mean to come back here no more, the chances are a thousand to one that you both will starve weeks before any one ever finds his way into this spot. So take your choice."

"I'll go with you," said Paul, promptly.

"The fat chap'll remain here till you come after him."

"Oh, lor'!" groaned Toby. "Must I stay here all alone?"

"You must," replied Murdock, impatiently, turning on his heel and rejoining his companions, who were standing at the door.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HERMIT-MISER.

"I never thought it of you," said Toby, looking at his companion reproachfully.

"Never thought what of me?"

"That you'd become a robber."

Paul laughed.

"Don't you see that I had to agree to help them out on the job they have in view to-night? A nice thing it would be if we were left here all by ourselves, bound hand and foot, like a pair of chickens, with no chance to get away and nothing to eat——"

"Nothing to eat?" gasped Toby. "Oh, lor'!"

"We'd starve to death before the week was out, and only our bones would be found in this isolated adobe shack, probably months from now. No, I couldn't afford to take that chance, for I saw that fellow meant to carry out his threat if I refused to join him. I'll be watched, of course, but I'm going to spoil their game if I can, and have them all captured and sent to jail, where they deserve to be."

It was now dusk, and Noach came inside, lit a lantern, which he placed on the table, and then ordered the boys to retire into the inner room.

Paul took up his position at the hole in the door which commanded the outer room, and saw Murdock and Kettler come inside, and the three gather about the table, on which Noach had already placed three whiskey flasks.

They lit their pipes afresh and began to talk about the expedition they had in view for that night.

"The old fellow's name is Matthew Scraggs," began Murdock, after a preliminary drink and a pull at his pipe. "He lives with a little gal, his niece, I understand, in an old dwellin' among the rocks of the seashore within a mile of San Bruno."

"And he's a miser, eh?" said Kettler, eagerly. "Which means that he has a stack of coin hidden somewhere in his house."

"That's his reputation."

"How long has he lived in that place?" asked Noach.

"Five or six years."

"And hain't never been robbed?" exclaimed the ruffian, in surprise.

"I guess not. He keeps his cabin barricaded up, and there ain't but one way to reach it, and that's by way of the beach at low tide."

"Where did he get his money from?" inquired Kettler.

"How should I know? I ain't worryin' how he got it; what's been botherin' me is how to take it away from him."

"I should think it ought to be easy enough if he lives all alone so far from town."

"It isn't easy. His place is strong enough to stand a siege, and he's got a lot of skyrockets on the place ready to shoot off if he's attacked. The people in San Bruno all know about that, and in consideration of his payin' a sum of money to the old adobe church three times a year they stand ready to go to his assistance in case his signals announce danger."

Noach and Kettler looked disgusted.

"How do you expect to get around all these difficulties, Murdock?"

"With the help of this boy fakir we captured this afternoon."

"What kin he do?"

"Don't you see he's got an uncommonly honest face considerin' the business he's in."

"What of it?"

"I expect to gain admittance to that cabin through him."

"How are you goin' to work it?"

"While we stand in the background, he will go to the door with a tale of woe about bein' caught by the tide among the rocks and the impossibility of returnin' to San Bruno afore mornin'. He'll ask for shelter."

"Maybe he won't get it. The miser will have his suspicions."

"We've got to chance that. If we can only manage to get old Scraggs to open his door, no matter how little, we'll be able to force an entrance."

"Suppose this young chap should give us away at the last moment?"

"Not much fear of that, for I shall hold my revolver in my hand ready to blow his brains out at the first sign of treachery on his part."

"If he does the right thing you're goin' to give him a share of the swag, are you?"

"Yes. That'll make him one of us and prevent him from peachin' afterward."

"How much are you goin' to allow him?"

"That depends on the amount of the haul. If we get \$10,000 or more we can give him \$500. He won't know how much we get, and that'll be a lot of money in his pocket. He can go his way then, and we'll go ours. He'd be a fool to lose such a chance, when he'll never be suspected of a hand in the game."

"When do we start off?" asked Noach.

"Oh, there ain't no hurry. The tide won't be low enough for us to get around the point until midnight. San Bruno

is only six miles away by a short cut through the range, so we've time enough to take things easy."

"The boy'll ride his own nag, eh?" said Kettler. "We must put a blanket on her for a saddle."

"If this thing pans out well we kin go back to Arizona where we come from and live on the fat of the land."

"That suits this chicken all right," said Noach, with a cheerful grin. "Here's hopin' it turns out to be a gold mine," and the ruffian raised his whiskey flask to his lips and took a long pull.

The others followed suit, and they gradually waxed quite merry over the prospect of securing the hidden wealth of miser Matthew Scraggs.

Paul had heard every word almost that escaped their lips, notwithstanding that they spoke kind of low.

But the air was clear and still, and sound carried further than people would generally have supposed.

Toby had fallen asleep with his head against the wall, and on this occasion he wasn't snoring.

The rascals smoked, drank and talked on for an hour, then Murdock announced that it was time they set off.

Accordingly the horses were saddled, Paul's mare being provided with an army blanket tied about his middle.

Paul was called out and the door again secured on the sleeping Toby.

Then the party started off, Paul being compelled to ride alongside of Murdock.

After passing through the defile they set off on a trot toward San Bruno.

There was no moon that night, and the sky was somewhat overcast, which was favorable to the designs of the rascals.

While yet more than a mile away they caught sight of the distant lights of the town that lay upon one corner of San Bruno bay, under the shelter of a heavy jutting point of land.

It was for the opposite side of the small bay that the bandits headed their animals.

Here lived the hermit-miser, as he was called, in a strongly built cabin of one story, perched in an almost inaccessible spot among the rocks of the shore.

It could be reached only at low tide, and then by one path alone, so narrow that a single determined man, sheltered among the rocks, could almost have held a regiment at bay.

Matthew Scraggs discouraged visitors, and consequently he was seldom if ever bothered with any.

Rumor said he was the possessor of wealth, which he hoarded merely for the pleasure of counting it over and over for his own satisfaction.

Rumor is more often a liar than not, but in this case Rumor told the truth.

Old man Scraggs was wealthy, and his riches had come to him from the sea.

He had been a fisherman in his time, and made a rather precarious living at the business.

But one night there was a terrible gale off the coast, a vessel in the Australian trade came ashore among the rocks.

All hands were lost, but the best part of the ship was found high and dry in a sandy bit of the shore by Matthew Scraggs next morning.

Thereafter it was remarked that old man Scraggs worked no more on the blue waters of the Pacific, and yet he always seemed to have plenty of money to provide for the simple wants of himself and his little niece.

He ceased to visit San Bruno except when necessity compelled him to, and people believing he had unexpectedly come into possession of considerable money nicknamed him the hermit-miser.

CHAPTER V.

THE SPRINGING OF A TRAP.

The bandits, with their unwilling accomplice, arrived on the beach an hour in advance of low tide, and they had to wait the full sixty minutes before they could traverse the narrow patch of shore left uncovered twice a day for a short time and thus reach the little cove where the miser's habitation was to be found.

Securing the horses in a safe spot they cautiously began the ascent of the rocky path leading to the door of the cabin.

A door and two windows looked seaward, but the windows were so small that no one could have forced a way through them.

The door was also small and stout, and heavily barricaded on the inside.

A dim light was reflected through one of the windows, which showed that, late as it was, the old man had not yet retired to rest.

"Countin' his money, p'haps," grinned Noach in a low voice.

"We'll save him that trouble after this," replied Murdock, with grim humor.

"A feller that don't spend his cash hain't no right to have any," chipped in Kettler. "If everybody hoarded up his wealth there wouldn't be none in circulation."

"Now, young feller, come here till I give you your lesson," said Murdock to Paul.

He proceeded to tell the boy what was expected of him.

"Remember, I shall be close behind you, watchin' everythin' you say and do, so don't try to play any game on us if you value your life, for it won't take more'n a brace of shakes to put a ball into your head if I suspect you tryin' on any kind of crooked business. As I told you afore, if this thing pans out you'll come in for your share of the winnin's with the rest of us, and then you kin light out for 'Frisco, or any other place, with more money in your clothes than you'd make as a travelin' fakir."

Much against his will, Paul advanced to the door of the cabin and knocked.

No notice being taken of the summons, he knocked again, louder than before.

As there was still no stir inside of the house, he thumped on the door for the third time.

The narrow window close at hand was opened and the thin voice of an old man inquired who was there, and what was wanted.

"I'm a boy," replied Paul. "I'd like shelter for the night."

"What are you doing here at this time of night?" asked the old man, suspiciously.

"Drifted into this cove in a leaky boat that went down as soon as I stepped out on the rocks," replied Paul, feeling the cold nose of a revolver under his ear.

"Do you live in San Bruno?"

"Say yes," whispered Murdock.

"Yes," answered Paul.

"Is the tide up at the point?"

"Yes."

"What is your name?"

"Paul Scott."

"Are you alone?"

"Yes," said Paul, as he felt the touch of the cold steel again.

There was silence for a moment or two, as if the old man was considering the advisability of permitting the youth to enter the cabin.

Paul hoped that he would refuse, for he despised himself for being a party to this cruel deception, and yet what else could he do?

These three bandits were desperate rascals, bent on robbing this old man, and if he (Paul) in any way disarranged their plans he felt certain they would shoot him down without the least mercy.

He was simply acting upon the old adage that self-preservation is the first law of nature, hoping that something would turn up later on by which he could redeem his conduct at this stage of the game.

"Come to the door," said the old man at length.

Paul heard Old Scraggs unbarring the entrance.

Presently the door swung inward a few inches, and then stopped, held thus by a stout chain.

A lamp was brought to the crack so that its light fell full upon Paul's face.

The old recluse was studying the boy's features, and perhaps looking beyond him for signs of a second person in the background.

Murdock, however, was foxy enough to keep well in the shade against the wall of the building, while Noah and Kettler held themselves in readiness for an instant dash forward.

Matthew Scraggs, seemingly reassured, returned the lamp to the table, let down the chain and opened the door.

"Come in," he said. "You may stay here till morning."

As Paul stepped forward, Murdock sprang to the door, shoved the boy in ahead of him and seized the old man by the arm.

Noah and Kettler followed close upon his heels.

Matthew Scraggs uttered a shrill cry of terror, which Noah cut off by grasping him by the throat and squeezing his windpipe.

"Tie the old dotard to yonder post," exclaimed Murdock to Kettler, and that rascal immediately seized Scraggs and dragged him over to the end of the room.

As Murdock glanced around the place, which was but meagerly furnished, his gaze lighted on a heavy brass-bound chest which stood beside the table.

He pounced upon it like a vulture swoops upon a fowl.

The key was in the lock, and giving it a quick turn, he threw up the cover, revealing a glittering display of gold and silver coin, all carefully arranged in piles.

The ruffian's eyes blazed with greed.

A package of documents lay on top of the gold, and with an impatient wave of his big hand, Murdock swept it to the floor, carrying with it a score of golden coins that jingled, and rolled about on the boards before they came to a rest.

Noah, looking over Murdock's shoulder, was fairly amazed at the amount of wealth which had so easily fallen into their hands.

"I was right," he chuckled, avariciously. "The old chap was countin' his coin. There must be thousands of dollars in that box."

"There's enough to keep us in rhino for a long time," said Murdock, exultantly, running his fingers through the heaps of money, and letting the coins slip like water through his fingers.

"Who'd have thought the old hermit had so much!" said Noah. "No wonder he was called a miser. All hands put on your masks."

This was done, an extra one being given to Paul.

"We'll put it into circulation again," laughed Murdock.

"You kin bet we will," cried Noah eagerly.

"Go down into the cove where our horses are tied and bring up the saddle bags."

"All right, cap; but I'd like a drink first," his eye resting on the row of jugs which stood on a near-by shelf. "There seems to be lickor to burn in them demijohns yonder."

Murdock's gaze followed the wave of Noah's arm, and his eyes brightened at the anticipation of the treat in store for them.

"Right you are," replied the leader of the enterprise. "Here, Paul Scott," he cried, turning to the lad, who was leaning against the dresser behind the table. "See what kind of stuff is in those jugs on that shelf."

Paul took the three demijohns down, one by one, and removing the stoppers smelt of the contents of each in turn.

Two of the jugs held gin, but very little was left in either.

The third was half full of whiskey.

Suddenly an idea came into his head, and he glanced around to see if either of the rascals was watching him.

They were not.

Their attention was altogether absorbed in the contemplation of the piles of gold and silver coin in the box.

The other ruffian was still engaged in tying up the hermit-miser.

Deftly Paul inserted his hand into an inner pocket, drew forth the bottle of laudanum he had been carrying since he and Toby left Los Angeles, and emptied its entire contents into the whiskey jug and shook it up.

He replaced the jugs in their former position and returned to Murdock to report the character of their contents.

Having secured Matthew Scraggs to a post in the rear of the room, the ruffians ordered Paul to bring forward the demijohns of liquor from the shelf in the corner.

Then they proceeded to make merry over their rich haul.

Murdock offered Paul a drink of the gin, which they wouldn't touch as long as the whiskey lasted, but the boy said he was not accustomed to strong drink, and retired to a stool under the shelf, whence he watched the rascals narrowly.

Poor old Scraggs, bound hand and foot to the post, was taking on dreadfully over the threatened loss of his money.

Occasionally he glanced at Paul with a look so full of agonized reproach that the boy experienced a spasm of remorse for the part he had acted in the affair, even though he had been driven to do it at the point of a revolver.

"Maybe I'll be able yet to undo the evil I have brought down on this poor old man," he mused. "If there is only enough of laudanum in that whiskey to stupefy them, all will be well; otherwise—well, what's the use of worrying? A very short time will tell how this matter is going to end."

At this point of his reflections a door beside the dresser began slowly to open, and as the boy's eyes happened to be on it at the moment, he stared, as it moved on its hinges, with great surprise.

Suddenly a face—the startled countenance of a young and beautiful girl—filled the opening, and her eyes roamed in acute dismay upon the intruders who were making so free with the house.

Paul gazed at this lovely apparition with eyes of wonder.

Was this the old man's niece that he had heard Murdock speak about?

CHAPTER VI.

A THRILLING CLIMAX.

As the girl's eyes wandered about the room they finally rested on Paul's face, and she realized that he was observing her.

A look of dread flew into her beautiful face and she looked as if she was about to faint away.

Paul tried to reassure her by placing one of his fingers to his lips and then pointing at the carousing ruffians.

Instinctively she seemed to understand that the boy was not an enemy, and a pleading look came into her eyes, as if appealing to him to do something in behalf of her unfortunate uncle.

Paul nodded to her, and made a motion for her to retire, as he feared if the scoundrels discovered her presence it would complicate matters.

She appeared to catch his meaning and withdrew, closing the door after her.

As the whiskey circulated from hand to hand the three ruffians grew more and more uproarious in their conduct.

They seemed to forget everything for the moment but the enjoyment of drink.

The drug was certainly having some effect upon them, but to what extent Paul could not tell.

Finally Murdock staggered to his feet and drawing his ugly-looking revolver fired it into the ceiling.

The other two immediately imitated his example, with a roar of mirth.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Paul, starting up in dismay. "This is more than I figured on. I'm afraid somebody will get hurt."

After firing a couple of shots into the roof of the cabin, Murdock's rum-crazed brain suggested a fresh freak.

He aimed his weapon straight at the helpless old miser.

As he pulled the trigger a sharp, whip-like report came from the door behind him, and he staggered and lurched toward where Paul stood, his revolver flying over to within a foot of the boy.

Paul glanced in a startled way at the door and saw the girl standing in the opening with a smoking rifle in her hand.

She had been just in time to save her uncle's life, for the rascal's aim was disarranged and the bullet flew wide of the post.

Murdock lay squirming on the carpetless floor, his fingers working convulsively and the froth gathering about his mouth.

Noach and Kettler started to their feet with terrible oaths on their lips.

But the effect of the laudanum was now overpowering their senses, and they could hardly see.

Still they could perceive that the shot which had struck their leader down came from behind, and their glazing eyes rested upon the girl with a vengeful rage.

Both raised their revolvers to shoot her down.

Paul, observing her danger, sprang forward, seized Murdock's weapon, and cocking it quickly fired at Noach.

The ball struck the butt of his revolver and glancing off hit Kettler in the mouth.

The pistols of both the rascals exploded harmlessly, Noach's dropping to the floor.

Kettler clapped one of his hands to his mouth with a hoarse yell of rage and pain, and his glittering eyes rested on the belligerent attitude assumed by the boy.

He tried to cover Paul with his weapon, but his hand trembled and wobbled so that it was impossible for him.

to take aim, and when he pulled the trigger the ball hit the edge of the ceiling.

The girl stepped resolutely into the room now and brought the rifle to bear on Noach, who was trying ineffectually to hold himself upright.

"Throw down your gun!" ordered Paul, advancing on Kettler, "and throw up your hands!"

The pistol slipped away from his nerveless grasp, but he could not throw up his arms.

With an insane look of baffled fury in his eyes the ruffian collapsed against his chair, which went down under his weight, and he lay struggling for a moment on the floor until he relapsed into unconsciousness.

As, for Noach, the only remaining scoundrel they had to deal with, he, without being ordered, threw up his arms under the mute persuasion of the pointed rifle.

He remained in that attitude but for a brief interval, his eyes rolling in their sockets, and his body leaning heavily against the table, then he suddenly collapsed as his feet gave away beneath him, and he lay an unconscious heap on the floor.

Murdock was also motionless by this time, but his labored breathing showed that he was not dead, but had yielded to the insidious influence of the laudanum.

The girl dropped the rifle and ran to her uncle, who had been a half stupefied witness of the exciting wind-up.

Paul stepped forward, laid Murdock's revolver on the table, stooped over Noach and drew from its sheath his glittering bowie knife.

With this in his hand he stepped up to Matthew Scraggs and quickly released him from his bonds. Then he took off his mask.

The old man regarded him with a bewildered expression, the girl with a look of gratitude.

"I thank you for saving us from those dreadful men," she said earnestly, as she took Paul's hand in hers and raised it to her lips. "You are a brave boy. But how came you to be here with——"

She paused in some embarrassment, as though the situation was not clear to her.

"You deceived me at the door, boy," said Matthew Scraggs, in trembling tones. "You said you were alone, and all the time these villains were with you, and only obtained entrance because I put faith in your honest face. Yet you have now taken sides against them. I do not understand what it all means."

"It means that I was forced to act as I did against my will. Those ruffians had me in their power. I was their prisoner, and they used me to deceive you. When I answered your questions I did so with the cold muzzle of a revolver pressed against my ear. I told you untruths because it was that or death to me. I had to do as I was told or take the consequences. I hope you will forgive me, for I have since done my best to save you. I doctored that whiskey with laudanum that I fortunately had in my pocket. And I shot at the two rascals who were trying to

get back at this young lady for her nervy act of shooting down their leader."

"I believe you, for your actions speak for themselves and there is an honest ring in your voice," said the old man. "They would have robbed, perhaps killed me, but for you. What is your name?"

"Paul Scott."

"Ah, yes; you told me so at the door before I admitted you. You are a stranger in these parts, are you not?"

"Yes. I am touring Southern California selling patent medicine."

"How came you to be in the hands of these men?"

"I and my companion left San Luis at noon to-day, or rather yesterday, in our wagon, for San Bruno, the village yonder on the bay. We were overtaken and held up on the road by those ruffians, who took a small sum of money from me, all they could find. Then they carried us, wagon and all, to their retreat in the mountain range a few miles back of this place. The wagon and my companion are still there. They had already planned this attack on you. They knew that it would be difficult to gain admission to this cabin openly. So they made use of me to further their purpose, hoping the stratagem would work. It did, but I think the result shows that after all it was fortunate for you that they brought me along. If you will get some rope we will bind these fellows, and later on we can deliver them over to the authorities at San Bruno. They are desperate villains, and from what I heard about them in San Luis, I guess they have been terrorizing the district. They are now in a fair way to be punished for their misdeeds."

"Heaven be praised!" cried the old man, who had now recovered his self-possession. "You are a brave and sturdy youth, and I thank you once more. You shall stay with us to-night. Indeed, you have no alternative, if the tide be up, as I suppose it is now, for it must have been low when you and these men came here, and that is much more than an hour ago. I will get the rope and help you bind the villains. But they must be carried outside afterward. I could not rest knowing they were within these walls where my money is."

He rushed to the open chest at once, flung himself down before the box and threw his arms protectingly about his wealth.

Then with feverish haste he gathered up the scattered gold pieces from the floor, returned them to the box, together with the bundle of papers, slammed down the lid, locked it, and put the key in his pocket.

After that he went for the rope.

"I must say that you are a brave girl," said Paul, looking at the miser's niece admiringly. "I guess you saved your uncle's life by shooting that drink-crazed scoundrel."

She blushed a little and looked down.

"What is your name?" he asked her.

"Suzanne Norwood," she answered softly.

"It is a pretty name. Almost as pretty as——"

He paused abruptly.

He was going to say "Almost as pretty as yourself," but thought he might offend her.

She blushed rosily as if she surmised what he had thought of saying.

Then Matthew Scraggs returned to the room with a lot of rope, with which they bound the rascals hand and foot with great care.

Without bothering to find out how badly Murdock was wounded they carried the three unconscious ruffians outside and left them stretched upon the ground under the shelter of a huge overhanging rock.

The door was then chained and barred once more, Scraggs, refusing assistance, dragged his precious box into an inner room, and Paul was handed a blanket on which to lie for the rest of the night.

CHAPTER VII.

SUZANNE GIVES AN EXHIBITION OF MARKSMANSHIP.

It was broad daylight when Paul awoke.

The brilliant morning sunlight was streaming through the narrow window panes, making a bright pathway across the floor of the living-room.

The door was wide open, so the boy knew some one else was astir before him.

He got up and walked outside.

He saw Matthew Scraggs bending over the still senseless forms of the bandits.

"Good morning, Paul Scott," said the old man, looking up on hearing his footsteps.

"Good morning, Mr. Scraggs. How is the wounded man?"

"He is as much alive as the others."

"Where was he hit?"

"The ball passed through his cheek and carried away two of his teeth. He is not seriously hurt."

"Your niece will be glad to learn that she did not kill him."

"He deserved death," replied the hermit, harshly. "I should feel no compunction in ridding the world of such a scoundrel."

"I trust he and his associates will get all that's coming to them after we deliver them to the San Bruno authorities," said Paul.

The old man looked over toward the point.

"It is high tide," he said. "'Twill be some hours yet before they can be removed from the cove. Well, let them lie there, like the carrion they are, until the hour comes."

"This is a lonely spot you have chosen for a home," ventured Paul.

"It may seem so to you and others who are accustomed to mix with the busy world, but to me it has charms that I should not part with at any price. Yonder rolls the vast Pacific. I see it in all its varying moods—in calm and in

storm; in sunshine and in shadow. I can never be lonesome while I have the sea under my window. It whispers to me its secrets when at rest, and when ruffled it thunders forth its impatience at the barriers which prevent it from reaching up to my very door. The sea and I understand each other, young man—yes, yes, we understand each other."

"The old fellow is a bit cracked, I guess," thought Paul as he listened to the hermit's strange words.

"This morning the ocean is in good humor; you see, it is smiling up at us," continued the hermit.

"Well, I shouldn't care to live in an out-of-the-way place like this, cut off entirely from the rest of the world except twice a day when the tide is low," said Paul.

"Youth has nothing in common with old age," replied Matthew Scraggs. "The world is yet before you, young man, and it looks fair and enticing; but I have passed through it, and have nothing pleasant to remember of it. It has treated me with base ingratitude, and I have no further use for it."

"Well, if I had your money I don't think I'd kick even if the world had gone back on me. I've always heard that the world takes its hat off to the man with the bank account. You seem to have coin enough to enjoy life with the best."

"Money doesn't buy happiness, young man," said Scraggs solemnly.

"So I've heard; but give me the money and I'll take my chances of being happy," grinned Paul.

"I should find no pleasure in spending money," said the old man. "The pleasure lies in saving it. Every one of my gold pieces is like a valued friend. I like to take them out of the box and talk to them, handle them gently and count them over and over again to see that none have got away. I take a personal interest in each one and would not lose a single piece for the world."

"And when you come to die you've got to leave them all behind you."

"I'll leave them to Suzanne. She will know how to care for them."

Paul grinned, for he guessed she wouldn't let them lie idle in an old brass-bound box, but put them in circulation where they'd earn a decent interest.

"At any rate that's what any sensible person would do; and that girl looks as if she had a level head on her shoulders," thought Paul.

At that moment they heard the silvery voice of Suzanne calling them in to the frugal breakfast she had prepared.

"I am sorry I can't offer you as much as you are probably accustomed to," said the hermit-miser, apologetically; "but we lead a simple life—Suzanne and I. Such as it is you are welcome to it."

Paul wasn't kicking.

He was hungry, and the spread, which consisted of fresh Spanish mackerel, white bread made by the girl herself, and coffee, looked inviting.

At any rate there was plenty of it and Paul made a good meal.

The miser retired to an inner room after breakfast, leaving the boy and his niece together.

"Your uncle seems to be a curious old man," remarked Paul.

"I am used to him," she replied; "if you knew him better I think you would see him in a different light."

"Are you really contented to stay in this secluded spot, Miss Suzanne?"

"I am contented to be with my uncle," she answered simply.

"With nothing to look at but the ocean and a lot of black rocks?"

"I have my books, and my sewing, and my rifle to practice with."

"You like to shoot, then?" said Paul in surprise.

"Yes."

"You are a good shot, I suppose?"

"I can hit a silver dollar nine times out of ten as far as I can see it," she said, without any appearance of bragging.

"The dickens you can! You're a dandy from Dandyville. You'd make a hit on the stage with that gun of yours."

She smiled as if she did not exactly understand his meaning.

"Shall I show you how I can shoot?" she asked, innocently.

"Sure. I'd like to see a specimen of your marksmanship."

She got her rifle and her cartridge belt, and they went outside.

"Stand yonder," she said, pointing to a spot thirty feet away, "and toss six stones in the air, one after the other."

Paul took his stand and tossed up the stones in succession.

As they fell her rifle cracked six times in rapid succession, and every bullet hit a stone.

"That settles it," said Paul, after he had seen this marvelous exhibition of shooting. "You can beat anything in that line I ever saw."

"Here is another stone," she said, picking one up. "Dare you hold that on the back of your hand at thirty feet and let me shoot it off?" she asked with a provoking little smile.

Paul looked rather dubiously at the stone, for it was rather a small one; then he looked at Suzanne, and the confident expression on her face reassured him.

"I take your dare," he said, taking his former position and holding out his hand, back upward, with the stone on it.

It seemed to him that she had hardly time to take aim when the rifle cracked and the stone was brushed off like a flash.

"Gee whiz! She's a beaut," he breathed. "I'll give her one more test."

He took a match from his pocket and held it up.

"Can you see that?" he asked.

She nodded.

"I'd like to see you hit it," he said.

She smiled at the challenge, sighted the mark for an instant and fired.

The match was torn from his fingers.

"I take my hat off to you, Miss Suzanne. You've got some of our expert rifle shots beaten to a standstill."

"Come with me now," she said. "The tide is on the ebb, and I am going to signal the town."

"Signal the town?" exclaimed Paul. "How?"

She led him into the cabin, and by a short ladder to the roof.

The back of the house stood against a perpendicular cliff perhaps sixty feet high.

From a deep hole in the rocks she drew out a big rocket.

Jabbing the wooden end into a crevice of the rocks she pointed the rocket in the direction of San Bruno and touched it off with a match.

It shot up into the air with a rushing sound and was instantly lost to sight, but presently a distant report was heard, and then Paul saw a dense cloud of black smoke spread out low down in the air.

A second rocket followed the first, with similar results.

"There," she said. "That will bring a dozen men from town to see what is the matter here. We will give those three bandits into their keeping to be taken to San Luis for trial."

"That's as good as a telephone, almost," snickered Paul.

By the time the tide was at its lowest ebb again the men from San Bruno were seen coming around the point on horseback.

Leaving their horses in the cove below they came up to the cabin.

"Well, what's the trouble?" asked the foremost, addressing himself to Suzanne.

Matthew Scraggs made his appearance and recounted his terrible experience with the three bandits about midnight.

Paul then told his story, from the moment he and Toby were held up in the road the previous afternoon.

"What have you done with the rascals?" asked the man, looking around.

The old hermit led the party to the back of the cabin and showed the three scoundrels, who were now beginning to come back to their senses.

"So these are the rascals who have been making life miserable for the county, eh?" said the spokesman of the party. "Well, we'll take care of them, never fear. You'll all have to come to San Luis to give evidence against them. We'll take them there early to-morrow, and the judge will hold the examination in the afternoon. That will give you time to get there easily. I will expect to see you, Matthew Scraggs, with your niece, at the San Luis Hotel, at one o'clock. And you, young man," turning to Paul, "must bring your friend, and appear at the court-house at two o'clock. Do you understand?"

"We'll be there," answered Paul. "I'm going to start for the mountain retreat of these bandits at once to rescue

my companion from his unpleasant situation. He is probably in a blue funk by this time; but it will be a couple of hours before I will be able to reach the spot."

Nothing more was said.

The men from San Bruno tied the rascals on their horses while Paul took possession of his own mare.

The boy bade the old man and his pretty niece good-by, promising to see them next day in San Luis, then he followed the party around the exposed beach at the point, and shortly afterward parted from them and headed for the mountain range.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRIBULATIONS OF TOBY.

Paul made all the haste he could to get back to the bandits' retreat in the hills, for he knew that Toby on awakening and finding himself alone in the adobe house, bound hand and foot as he was, would be badly broken up.

Although there was plenty of food in the place, the fat boy would be unable to get at it, and thus the gnawing of hunger would be added to Toby's other troubles.

But to find the narrow defile in the mountains was not such a simple matter as Paul had reckoned it.

He had narrowly observed certain landmarks the night before, when he was forced to accompany Murdock and his companions to San Bruno bay, and consequently he believed that he would have no great difficulty in retracing his route to the defile; but in daylight things looked much different, the landscape was less contracted, and therefore Paul in spite of his sharp eyes found himself all at sea.

"This is tough," he muttered. "Here it is all of twelve o'clock. I've been roaming up and down these byways in the hills and I can't, to save my life, find that defile. Those bandits hit upon a pretty secret spot for their headquarters, I am bound to say. Poor Toby! I guess he thinks by this time that he's been left to die of starvation in that old house."

Paul was getting well-nigh desperate, and the time of day was two in the afternoon, when he stumbled right on the defile at last.

"Thank heaven! I've found it. It's like the answer to a Chinese puzzle, upon my word it is."

He felt immensely relieved as he directed the mare into the defile, and rode along its serpentine course, bordered by lofty peaks and crags, partially covered with verdure, until he emerged into the amphitheater beyond and saw the dirty adobe house right before him.

"Get up, Anna Maria," he cried to the mare, as soon as he felt the soft ground under the animal's feet. "You'll have a rest and chance to eat your dinner in a moment or two."

The tired horse pricked up her ears and broke into a smart trot that soon carried Paul to the door of the house,

before which the van stood as it was left the afternoon before.

Paul quickly dismounted, removed the blanket which had served for a saddle, and turned the animal loose.

Then he entered the house.

He unshipped the fastenings that secured the door of the inner room and faced the disconsolate Toby, who was by this time reduced to the depths of despair.

"Oh, dear; oh, dear!" exclaimed Toby, two big tears stealing down his fat cheeks. "Wherever have you been so long? I'm 'most starved. My stomach feels like it had caved in for want of something to hold the sides up. These cords have made my wrists and ankles so numb that I don't believe I shall ever get feeling into them any more. Did those rascals come back with you, or did you get away from them?"

"Those rascals are in jail long before this," replied Paul, as he cut the cords with the bowie knife which formerly belonged to Noach and which he had retained, together with Murdock's revolver.

"In jail! Glory hallelujah!" piped Toby, as he tried to stand up.

He fell back in a heap on the floor, for there was no power in his feet to sustain his weight.

You might have struck his digits with a club at that moment and he wouldn't have felt the blow.

His limbs from his knees down were "asleep" by reason of the partial stoppage of blood circulation.

"Give me a drink of water and something to eat," he begged.

Paul hastened to fetch a jug of water from a nearby spring, and Toby drank about a quart before he removed the jug from his lips.

"Here's a fistful of crackers to chew on till I can get dinner ready," said Paul, handing his companion about a dozen soda crackers.

Toby attacked them ravenously.

Paul started a fire in the little iron stove in the main room, and while the water was boiling for the coffee he washed the dirty dishes left from the night before.

Having made the coffee, Paul fried a big mess of eggs and bacon, and spread out the dishes on the table in readiness to serve the meal up as soon as it was ready, for he guessed the smell of the cookery was setting Toby wild inside.

Before dinner was quite ready Toby's lower limbs recovered their usefulness, and he came into the outer room with a famished look on his chubby face.

"Are you hungry?" grinned Paul, giving the pan a shake that started the thin slices of potatoes sizzling again.

"Oh, lor', don't mention it," groaned the fat boy, licking his chops at the sight of the food. "I could eat an elephant."

"It's a wonder all that fat you've got on your bones wouldn't stand by you in an emergency like this. You oughtn't to be real hungry for a week."

"Don't you believe it, Paul Scott. My stomach is so empty I can hear it rattle like a bag of bones."

"If I was you I'd get a new stomach," snickered Paul. "Or serve a dispossession notice on that wolf that's inside of you. Your insides give you more trouble than anybody I've ever heard tell of."

"It ain't my fault. I didn't make my stomach."

"I know you didn't. But you ought to educate it."

"Educate it! What do you mean by that?" asked the fat boy wonderingly.

"You pamper it too much. When it hankers for pie, as it always seems to be doing, you're not satisfied till you swallow a whole one down to the last morsel of crust. That's where you make a mistake."

"But I can't live without pie," objected Toby, dismally. "Pie is the finest thing made. Just think of a nice, fat, juicy pie! Oh, lor'! What did you speak about it for? It makes my mouth water to think of all I've ate."

"Then don't think of them. Sit up to the table and try some of this bacon and eggs, with fried potatoes, and a loaf of white bread. Those rascals laid in a good supply of eatables, and drinkables, too," as he glanced at a row of yet unopened whiskey flasks which stood on a shelf in a corner.

Toby needed no second invitation to dinner, and the way he went at the food was a caution.

"You seem to be laying in a week's supply so as to be sure you'll have enough," chuckled Paul, who was pretty hungry himself.

Toby was too busy to make any answer.

"Here's a cup of coffee," said Paul. "Don't choke yourself, now."

Nothing more was said until everything on the table had vanished from view, including the entire contents of the coffee pot.

"Now, we'll take a short rest and then go on to San Bruno," said Paul.

Toby looked the picture of contentment as he reclined on the grass in the afternoon sunshine and listened while his companion recounted the events through which he had passed since he had been separated from the fat boy.

"Ain't I glad to know those chaps are in the calaboose," said Toby. "Especially that villain who took pleasure in abusing me. I wish they'd tie him to a post and let me tickle his legs with a whip-lash. Wouldn't I just lay it on till he danced? Oh, no; of course not."

"We've got to return to San Luis to-morrow to testify against them," said Paul.

"I'll tell the judge how that fellow treated me. I hope he'll get forty years at least."

"Forty years!" snickered Paul. "Why don't you say life and be done with it?"

"He ought to be sent up for life, and the other two get thirty years apiece."

"They'll get all that's coming to them, I guess."

Paul got up and went to the wagon, let down the back and got inside.

"Look at those mattresses," he said, throwing them out

on the ground. "Noach hacked them all to pieces in his search for my money."

"They're ruined," replied Toby.

"I believe half my supply of cough mixture is gone to smash," said Paul, bringing out one of the boxes.

He found and threw away more than a dozen broken bottles of the Elixir of Life, and upon examining a second box he found as many more damaged bottles of the stuff.

A third box had not suffered, and only one bottle was discovered to be broken in the fourth and last box.

Paul then replaced their clothes and other personal belongings in the trunk, and cleaned out and tidied up the inside of the van as best he could.

Then he went after the mare and harnessed her to the shafts again.

"Now we'll start on, Toby," he said.

The fat boy, before he got up on the seat, entered the house and took possession of what remained of the bag of crackers, which he stuffed into his pockets.

"Get up, Anna Maria," chirruped Paul, and the outfit started for San Bruno.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.

Paul, Toby and the covered wagon reached San Bruno some time before dark, and stopped in front of the smaller of the two hotels in the place, while the boys went in and had their supper.

Subsequently Paul drove the van to the corner of two of the principal streets, and after attracting a crowd by their music the lad started in to sell his patent remedies.

He drove a brisk trade until buyers got scarce, and then he closed up for the night and drove off into the suburbs, where, after tethering Anna Maria, the two boys turned in on a couple of new mattresses which Paul had purchased.

Murdock and his companions had been committed to the town lock-up pending their transfer to San Luis, the county seat, where they would be tried.

The San Bruno jail was a one-story adobe building, with a single barred window and a heavy wooden door reinforced with stout iron bands.

It was plenty strong enough to hold ordinary malefactors, and no one had ever been known to escape from it.

When the jailer locked the big door on the three bandits he was satisfied they were secure until they should be wanted.

They had been searched after the usual fashion, and everything found upon them taken into the jailer's office next door.

There were some things on their persons that were not taken, because the search was not thorough enough.

Each of the ruffians had concealed in his trousers a

pair of fine, highly tempered files, which they had provided for just such an emergency as the present.

When the jailer carried in their supper to them, and a blanket for each to lie upon through the night, he was perfectly assured that he would find them there in the morning.

When he returned in the morning with their breakfast the adobe jail was empty.

The three stout bars at the window had been sawed away, and that showed how they had made their escape.

The jailer was certain they had had assistance from the outside, for how could they saw through those bars without the necessary tools?

Which went to prove that he didn't know everything.

However, they were gone, and the jailer had a bad quarter of an hour trying to explain to the justice that he wasn't to blame for their escape.

A posse of armed citizens was organized to scour the range after them, and as it was known that Paul Scott, the "medicine man," knew where their retreat was, he was persuaded to accompany the pursuers.

Toby Titmarsh was left in charge of the wagon and the mare, with a fine large apple pie to keep him company.

He ate the pie, and then, feeling drowsy, went to sleep.

In the course of a couple of hours the uneasy movement of the wagon woke him up.

He was surprised to find the van in motion.

"Paul must have got back, harnessed up and started on the road again," he thought, without taking the trouble to open his eyes, for if there was anything Toby liked it was to be left alone to slumber as long as he chose.

A fly lighted on his nose and he strove to brush it away with his hand.

But he couldn't raise his hand—something seemed to hold both of them down.

He opened his eyes quick enough now, and, to his surprise, not to say consternation, he found that his hands were bound by a rope which passed around his waist.

"What's the meaning of this?" he gurgled. "I s'pose Paul has been playing a joke on me."

Here he was treated to another surprise.

A very pretty young girl was seated on Paul's mattress, opposite to him.

Her hands were bound behind her back, and then secured to one of the hoops which supported the canvas cover of the van, and a piece of cloth covering her mouth was tied at the back of her neck.

Toby looked at her with the utmost amazement, and as she was wide awake she returned his stare.

The fat boy couldn't understand what this all meant.

How came this girl, bound and gagged, in the wagon?

Surely Paul Scott wasn't engaged in the kidnapping business.

Naturally he turned his eyes to the wagon seat in search of Paul.

The flap exposed a hairless countenance he had seen before, and under circumstances not to his liking.

It was the face of Noach, the rascal who had amused himself on the previous day at the fat boy's expense.

"Oh, lor'!" gasped Toby, collapsing against the side of the wagon. "The bandits have got hold of me again. I'm a dead Titmarsh this time, for sure. They won't do a thing to me now, I'll bet four bits. Why did I go to sleep? Paul told me to keep my eyes skinned. If I had done as he ordered me to I might have escaped this awful situation. Oh!"

The groan Toby uttered reached Noach's ears, and he thrust his ugly countenance into the wagon.

"You've woke up, have you, you bundle of fat?" he chuckled. "Well, don't let me hear another sound from you until further notice, or I'll go in there and tickle your ribs with my whip."

Satisfied he had terrified his stout prisoner, he resumed a conversation he was carrying on with Kettler, who shared the seat with him.

Toby turned his attention once more to the girl opposite.

It was evident now to him that the bandits had made her a prisoner for some purpose, and he felt sorry for her.

She put him in mind of Paul's description of Suzanne Norwood, the hermit-miser's niece—the girl who could shoot pebbles and matches out of a person's hand at thirty feet.

It was too bad this girl was gagged, for it would relieve the monotony of his position if they could only talk together.

Under the circumstances that seemed to be impossible.

Finally, after they had looked at each other for some time, Toby thought he'd speak to her anyway.

"You're a prisoner, ain't you?" he asked in a low voice, fearful that Noach might overhear him and come in and execute his threat.

The girl nodded.

"Did the bandits carry you off from San Bruno?"

She nodded again.

"You don't know where these men are carrying us to, do you?"

She shook her head.

"They ran off with this wagon while I was asleep. This van belongs to Paul Scott and——"

She nodded her head energetically.

"I wonder what she means by that?" thought Toby, looking at her closely. "She nodded her head when I said Paul Scott. She can't know him. How could she? You don't know Paul Scott?" he asked her questioningly.

She nodded.

"You do know him?" in surprise.

Another positive nod.

"It can't be that you are Suzanne, the hermit's niece?" he asked again, as the possibility of the thing occurred to him.

She nodded.

"Are you the girl that can hit a flying pebble every time

with a rifle ball?" he continued, regarding her with a fresh and admiring interest.

She nodded, and seemed to smile.

"Cæsar's ghost!" he ejaculated. "And you shot that man Murdock, the leader of the three bandits?"

Another nod from the girl.

"And they've kidnapped you to get square with you, I suppose."

Suzanne, for it was indeed she, made no answer to this—probably because she could not speak and tell Toby that the real reason why she had been carried off by these rascals was because they hoped, with her as a hostage, to make terms with the old hermit, involving the transfer to them of most of his wealth in return for her liberty.

This was the truth, and Suzanne had easily guessed it.

From the rough movements of the wagon Toby judged they were somewhere among the hills, and he wondered if the ruffians were returning to the adobe house behind the defile in the range.

He also wondered what Paul would do when he came back to San Bruno and found himself and the horse and wagon missing.

Surely the disappearance of Suzanne would result in a search party being sent out to rescue her, and then he, too, would be saved.

At this point in his reflections the wagon came to a rest in the middle of a shallow stream to allow the horse to take a drink.

Noach handed the reins to Kettler, and to Toby's dismay turned around and came into the wagon.

"Now, young lady," he said to Suzanne, "I'll relieve you of that gag."

Thus speaking he took the cloth from her mouth.

She felt immensely relieved, but she didn't thank him just the same.

He cast a sardonic look at Toby and then returned to his seat.

The wagon moved on, and thereafter the road became more rough, and the joltings more frequent.

Toby and Suzanne were now able to converse together.

She told him that she and her uncle had arranged to go by the stage to San Luis to attend the examination of the three bandits.

She had left the cove ahead of Matthew Scraggs, and was walking along the shore close to the outlying houses of San Bruno, when she was suddenly set upon by the very rascals she supposed to be safely in prison at San Luis.

They gagged and bound her before she had recovered from the surprise of the attack, and carrying her up the road they came upon the van, with the horse tethered close by, and Toby asleep inside.

"They lifted me into the wagon," she went on to say, "bound you, as you slept, put the animal into the shafts and drove off, but in what direction I have not the least idea."

"Didn't any one see them kidnap you?" asked Toby. "I don't see how they could do it in broad daylight."

"If any one saw them carry me off they didn't interfere."

"I wonder what they intend to do with us?" said Toby, apprehensively.

"I am sure they mean to hold me a prisoner until I am either rescued or my uncle pays them a large sum of money to let me go."

"Maybe Paul Scott would pay them something to let me go, too," said Toby, hopefully.

"It's more likely," she said, leaning over and whispering, "that he'll head a party of San Bruno people to run these bandits down and take us away from them. He's a brave boy, and a smart boy, too, and that's just what I think he'll do."

Toby sincerely hoped that Paul was already on their trail, for a sensation of discomfort in the region of his stomach told him that he was growing hungry again.

CHAPTER X.

PAUL STARTS TO THE RESCUE OF SUZANNE AND TOBY.

If the bandits were going back to their retreat in the range they were taking a different and much longer route than the customary one.

Then again there were only two of them—Murdock was missing.

The truth of the matter was, after giving directions to Noach, he had remained in the neighborhood of San Bruno for two reasons: the first was to communicate his intentions and terms to Matthew Scraggs; the other, to find out if the people of the town were going to make any great efforts to try and recapture him and his two associates.

Immediately after the abduction of Suzanne, Murdock, with a dollar in his pocket which Noach had taken from Toby's pocket, entered a small drug store which sold stationery, and buying a sheet of paper and an envelope, wrote a note in his peculiar style to Matthew Scraggs, in which he stated that his niece Suzanne was now in their hands, and that he would give Scraggs the chance to ransom her for the sum of \$20,000.

"I'll give you a week to make up your mind," the note went on. "If within that time you do not bring the sum mentioned in gold to the spindle rock at the foot of the twin peaks near the road to San Luis, and come alone, you will never see the girl again, as I shall shoot her in revenge for the wound she gave me in your cabin. If you comply with this demand, and bring the money in the manner stated, then the girl will be allowed to go back with you unharmed. If you think you can save the girl by sending a posse to search the range for us, why, try it; but remember that in that case the girl's fate will lie at your door."

"I guess that will bring him to the scratch," muttered

Murdock, as he sealed the envelope and addressed it to Matthew Scraggs.

Then he walked boldly up the main street of the town, entered the small post-office, bought a stamp and mailed the letter.

Before dark the posse, with the deputy sheriff and Paul Scott at their head, which had been scouring the range since morning to find some trace of the three bandits, returned unsuccessful from their quest.

Murdock saw them ride into town, and he smiled sarcastically as they swept by his hiding place on the outskirts of San Bruno.

He followed them into town in the gathering dusk and saw them dismount before the office of the jail, and enter the building.

A crowd gathered around the door to hear the news, and Murdock mixed with it without attracting notice.

Finally he took advantage of the general attention being concentrated on the office to unhitch the deputy sheriff's fine roan stallion, and walk it down the street a little way.

Then he mounted the animal and rode away from the town to meet his companions at the appointed rendezvous in the range.

There was the dickens to pay when the deputy sheriff missed his horse, with a fine pair of revolvers in the holster.

No one had noticed the disappearance of the animal, and so the town official was left completely at sea in the matter.

He was mad as a hornet, for he thought one of his friends had played a practical joke on him.

But a similar discomfiture awaited Paul Scott when he went to the spot where he had left Toby in charge of the van and the mare.

Toby and the outfit were gone, but where it had vanished to no amount of investigation on Paul's part gave the slightest clue.

So Paul had to give the matter up for the night and go to the hotel where he and Toby had taken their meals.

Next morning Paul started out on a fresh hunt after the wagon.

It was not long before a woman, living in the suburbs of the town, told him that she had seen a van such as he described, drawn by a horse answering to the appearance of Anna Maria, driven by a smooth-faced, rough-looking man, with a bearded companion, moving rapidly up the road to the northeast.

"When did you see the wagon, ma'am?" he asked.

"About noon, yesterday," she replied.

"By George!" exclaimed Paul. "I believe those rascals have taken possession of my rig again. They must have been hanging around this neighborhood while we were searching for them in the range. But why should they take the trouble to carry off poor Toby? Possibly to prevent him from giving an alarm. They'll probably dump him out in the wilds somewhere, and let him find his way back to San Bruno as best he can. The rascals! What shall I do now? Without my outfit I'm completely stranded. No use talking, I must follow those scamps, even at

the risk of my life. All my money is hid away in that wagon, and I can't afford to be done out of it. I must borrow a good horse and a rifle. I'll run down to the cove and ask Suzanne to loan me her gun. She'll do it, I know. Then as to a horse, I guess I can scare one up when I explain why I want it."

Having decided on his line of action, Paul hurried over to the point, wondering whether the tide was low enough to permit him to walk around to the cove.

He found that it was.

On his way around the little patch of beach he met the postmaster's son, who had been sent to deliver Murdock's letter to Matthew Scraggs.

Paul had scarcely caught sight of the cabin, perched among the rocks, before he saw the old hermit come out of the door and walk up and down in front of the house like a man who had lost his senses.

"What's the matter with him?" the boy asked himself, as he watched Scraggs apparently tearing his hair and acting like mad. "He must be subject to fits. Well, I don't wonder. The old chap is half dozey, between his money and the solitude of the place. The way he talked yesterday morning about the sea and himself understanding each other is enough to prove he's cracked in his upper story."

Matthew Scraggs paid no attention to the approach of Paul Scott.

The boy made his way up the pathway to the cabin and looked in at the door, thinking to see Suzanne, but she wasn't there.

Then he walked up to the hermit and spoke to him.

The old man stopped and stared wildly at the boy for a moment, then he seemed to recognize him.

Paul saw he was greatly agitated, the tears were trickling down his pointed beard, and he was shaking as with the ague.

In one trembling hand he held an open letter.

"Why, what's the matter?" asked the boy, much astonished at his strange actions and appearance.

"Suzanne is gone!" cried Scraggs with a burst of grief, which showed how much he was attached to his young relative. "Gone! Gone! Stolen by those villains!"

"Suzanne gone! Stolen! What do you mean?" gasped Paul.

"Read this letter!" exclaimed the hermit, thrusting the paper into the boy's fingers. "Read it, and you will understand all."

Paul read the letter.

He was startled by the cold-blooded terms proposed by Murdock.

"I must sacrifice my money to save her!" cried the old man, with a hollow groan, that showed it was like parting with his very life blood to be compelled to give up so much of his cherished wealth.

Yet it was clear, to his credit, that his niece was more to him, when it came to the pinch, than even his darling

gold, though it was quite probable he never would recover from the loss of his money.

"Calm yourself, Mr. Scraggs, and let us talk the matter over together. Perhaps something can be done to rescue Suzanne from the clutches of those villains, without you being obliged to yield to their terms."

"No, no!" ejaculated the hermit. "Nothing must be done. He says if I send a posse to search for them her fate will rest at my door. In that case he means to kill her, and I cannot lose Suzanne. No, no; I cannot lose her! Better that my gold, which I am saving for her, that she may be rich after I am dead, should go. She must not be hurt."

Paul's respect for the hermit-miser went up several hundred per cent. on hearing him speak in that strain.

"Look here, Mr. Scraggs, don't get so excited. He gives you a week to decide what you will do, and it will take you only a few hours to carry the necessary sum to the spot he has indicated on the road to San Luis. In the meantime, turn this matter over to me. Those rascals have stolen my horse and wagon, and carried off my companion, and I mean to get my property back if I can. In seeking for my outfit I may come across Suzanne, and I promise you I will attempt her rescue even at the risk of my life. I came over here to borrow her rifle. Will you let me have it?"

"Yes, yes," cried the old man, eagerly. "Do you mean to go out alone?"

"I do. They will be on the lookout for a posse, and not for a lone boy like me. I mean to hunt the range till I get wind of their whereabouts, and then I hope by stratagem to get the better of them."

"You are a brave boy," said Matthew Scraggs, patting him on the shoulder. "I have confidence in you. I will wait six days for you to do something. On the seventh, if you do not return with Suzanne, I will take the gold to the spindle rock near the San Luis road."

"That is just what I was about to propose—that you give me six days to rescue Suzanne. It is settled, then?"

"Yes, yes; it is settled," replied the hermit, feverishly.

"Then get me her rifle and some cartridges, and I will be off before the tide makes me a prisoner in this cove."

Matthew Scraggs hastened into the cabin and soon returned with Suzanne's rifle and her cartridge belt, which was full of ammunition.

The gun was a magazine rifle, and six shots could be fired before it was necessary to reload.

Paul strapped the belt around his waist under his jacket, where he already carried Murdock's revolver on one side and Noach's bowie on the other.

With the rifle in his hand he looked to be prepared for almost any kind of an emergency he was likely to run up against.

Then seizing Matthew Scraggs by the hands, he told him to keep up his courage.

"Depend on it, I will save Suzanne if the thing be possible. Good-by."

He ran lightly down the narrow path to the cove, circled the point through the first flow of the incoming tide, and started for San Bruno to borrow a horse.

CHAPTER XI.

PAUL TRACKS THE BANDITS TO THEIR NEW RETREAT.

Paul Scott succeeded in procuring a stout young horse, used to mountain travel, and filling a pair of carpet bags with a week's supply of food he set off toward the defile in the hills.

He hoped to find the bandits back again in their retreat.

He took a roundabout course at a slow pace, for he did not propose to take the chances of entering the little enclosed amphitheater until after dark.

There was a beaten track leading well to the north of the defile, and he followed it.

About five o'clock he reached the very creek the wagon had crossed the previous afternoon, and as the ground was soft hereabout he noticed the impression of the wheels.

His heart gave a jump.

"I guess I've struck the right trail," he breathed. "Some wagon, probably my van, has recently come this way."

For some distance the track was more or less plain, then he lost it over a stretch of hard ground.

He went straight on, and by and by saw the occasional track of the wheels again.

They led him around in a semi-circle, and away from the defile.

"I guess they're afraid to go back to their old roosting-ground for a while, at any rate. This track leads right into a wild section of the mountains. Rather rough traveling for a wheeled vehicle, I should think."

It certainly was, as rocks and tree stumps, and other obstructions, abounded.

"They're liable to break an axle over this road unless they're mighty careful."

Darkness came down upon him while he was still following the trail.

He then decided to camp where he was for the night.

Picketing the horse where he could get at the grass, Paul ate his supper of cold meat and bread, which he washed down with coffee he had brought in a bottle.

He sat for an hour with his back against a big rock and figured upon what he should do when he overhauled the rascals.

Then wrapping himself in the blanket he carried for that purpose, he was soon fast asleep in the solitude of the range, with the broad canopy of heaven above him and the stars winking down to keep him company.

He was up at the first blush of day in the eastern sky, leisurely ate his frugal breakfast, and saddling his animal took up the trail once more.

It was not an easy matter to follow it here, and he was obliged to proceed a good deal by guesswork.

But he had a sharp pair of eyes, and being desperately in earnest, he noticed signs showing the late passage of a wagon that he would not otherwise have taken note of.

As the day grew apace he saw that the ruffians' trail led around toward the south.

In following their tracks he circled a great spur in the range and came into a long and narrow valley between two sections of the mountains.

Here a wagon could proceed with tolerable ease and safety, and as the ground was of a yielding nature the double wheel track of the van was plainly recognizable.

In order to attract less attention in case the rascals might be somewhere on the watch, Paul dismounted and led the animal by the bridle.

Thus he crossed the long valley to the further end and there noted that the wagon track led through another defile very similar to the one on the other side of the range.

He followed it with due caution, and it led him into a pocket that had many of the characteristics of the amphitheater where the adobe house was situated.

It was very much smaller than the other place, however, being scarcely more than two hundred yards across to a point where a rough pathway led up to a depression among the hills.

Near the center of this pocket Paul saw his van, while Anna Maria and another horse were contentedly nibbling the luxuriant grass close by.

"So I've tracked these rascals to their hiding place, have I?" he muttered grimly, as he drew back into the shadows of the ravine. "Well, I've done better than I expected in so short a time."

Looking more narrowly toward the wagon, in the hope of seeing either Toby or Suzanne, he made out the forms of two of the three bandits stretched out in the grass under the van, smoking cigars and apparently talking.

"Where is the third man?" mused Paul. "He may be on the watch somewhere about here. I must look out that he does not come on me unawares."

He looked furtively back up the defile.

There were a score of places where a watcher might lie concealed, and he began to wonder if his approach was already known to the invisible bandit, who he knew to be Noah, as the other two had hair on their faces.

Paul stood for half an hour alternately watching the smokers and looking up the defile, but nothing occurred to indicate that he had been seen.

"I must find some place to picket my horse where he will not be seen," said the boy to himself. "Some place on the other side of the valley. I can then come back here and watch these chaps to better advantage. If the rascals only knew my eyes were on them at this moment they wouldn't be taking things so easy."

He led his animal back through the mountain pass, narrowly watching every rock or bit of brush that might conceal a spy, until he reached the valley once more.

Then he continued on across the narrow plain till he made out a sequestered nook sheltered by a line of trees.

Here he tethered his horse, and here beside a trickling rill he ate his noon-day meal, and laid his plans for future action.

The day was very warm and the air still.

Nature seemed to have gone to sleep under the broiling Southern California sun.

Paul recrossed the valley and entered the defile once more.

He passed through to the point from which he had previously reconnoitered the pocket, and creeping into a mass of thick vegetation near at hand he felt he was secure from observation.

He saw that he had not reached the spot a moment too soon, for one of the two bandits, whom he recognized as Murdock, was slowly walking toward the entrance to the pass.

"I had a narrow escape," thought Paul, his eyes on the man. "Had I come a few moments later we must have met in the defile, and then there would have been something doing. I wonder where he is going?"

Murdock kept right on till he reached the defile, passing within a yard of where Paul was concealed, and then disappeared up the pass.

"I suppose he's gone to take a look up the valley, and see if any one is in sight," mused the boy.

It was a good guess, for this was exactly the errand the bandit was bent on.

The other ruffian was stretched out under the wagon as if asleep.

Noah was still missing, and Paul would have given something to have known where he was at that moment.

At that stage of the game the canvas folds behind the wagon seat were pushed back and the fat countenance of Toby appeared.

He looked all around the van as well as he could, and after a moment or two drew back again into the interior.

"I wonder what Toby is up to?" muttered Paul. "Is he planning to make his escape? I'm afraid he isn't smart enough to succeed."

At that moment another face appeared from behind the canvas—the bright and alert face of Suzanne Norwood.

CHAPTER XII.

SUZANNE AND TOBY GET AWAY FROM THE BANDITS.

Paul watched the girl with sparkling eyes.

It looked to him as if she and Toby had made up their minds to try and get away from their captors.

Suzanne glanced around just the same as the fat boy had done.

Then she stepped lightly over the seat, knelt down and gazed under the wagon.

Of course she caught sight of the sleeping Kettler. She drew back and seemed to be considering the situation.

Paul saw Toby's face reappear behind her.

At length Suzanne sprang to the ground and ducked low in the grass.

She waited a moment and then waved her arm for Toby to follow.

The fat boy emerged from the van like a baby elephant, and the front of the wagon tipped with his weight as he started to descend backward.

He reached the ground all right and dived down beside Suzanne, but he was so large that he put one in mind of an ostrich hiding its head in the sand while the rest of its body was exposed.

Any one looking that way could have seen him.

Paul watched their movements with a good deal of interest.

They lay in the grass two or three minutes and then Suzanne rose up and looked toward Kettler.

He had not stirred.

Then she scrutinized the pocket on every side, and seeing nothing stirring she spoke to Toby, who also got up, and they started for the entrance of the defile.

"Suzanne," cried Paul, softly, as she and the fat boy were passing within a few feet of where he lay concealed in the bushes.

The girl gave a little, suppressed scream, while Toby exclaimed, "Oh, lor'!" and began to shake in his shoes.

"Don't be alarmed, Suzanne. It is I, Paul Scott."

"Paul Scott!" she cried joyfully, recognizing his voice. "Where are you?"

"Here," and Paul rose out of the bushes.

"Oh, Paul!" exclaimed Suzanne, running up to him and catching him by the hands.

"Paul Scott, is it really you?" gurgled Toby, in astonishment.

"Sure thing, Toby," grinned the lad, as he drew Suzanne down into the shelter of the bushes. "Get under cover, Toby."

In a moment they were out of sight.

"It isn't possible that you came out here after us all alone, is it, Paul?" asked Suzanne, laying her hand on his arm. "Surely, some of the San Bruno people came with you?"

"No. I came here all by myself."

"Why were you so reckless? You know these men would think nothing of shooting you down on sight."

"There was a good reason why I could not bring a posse with me."

"What reason? How could you hope to get the better of these desperate rascals yourself?"

"By stratagem. Murdock wrote a letter to your uncle demanding \$20,000 for your ransom. He said that if any attempt was made to capture him and his associates it would be at the risk of your life. He gave your uncle a week to consider the matter, and bring the money to a

certain spot which he stated. If Mr. Scraggs failed to do so, Murdock threatened to kill you in revenge for the wound you gave him the other night in the cabin."

Suzanne, though naturally a courageous girl, shuddered and turned pale, for she believed the scoundrel was fully capable of carrying out his threat.

"Then you have seen my uncle?" she said, in a low voice.

"Yes. I told him that it was better that I should attempt your rescue alone, as these rascals would certainly be on the lookout for a posse, and would take measures to protect themselves against any attack. Doubtless they had determined to kill you before they would be taken. Now I reasoned that I might possibly be able to track the scoundrels alone without attracting their notice. Your uncle thought well of the plan and agreed not to comply with Murdock's demands until I had had a fair chance to do something to thwart the rascal. So I started out on a borrowed horse yesterday morning, and after some hours I came upon the tracks made by the van. I followed them, and they led me here."

"You took a great risk. How brave you are!" she said admiringly. "But we ought not to remain here talking," she said, anxiously. "The other two men may come back at any moment. Let us get away at once through the pass."

"No," replied Paul. "Murdock passed through the defile a little while ago. If we went that way now we would be likely to meet him. He is armed and one of us at least might get hurt. We must wait till he comes back."

"And the other man—the one called Noach?" asked Suzanne. "Have you seen him?"

"No. I wish I knew where he was."

"Why, you have my rifle, haven't you?" she remarked in some surprise.

"I have. Perhaps you'd better take it. I have a revolver and a knife."

He persuaded Suzanne to take her weapon, which she knew how to use so well, and unbuckled the cartridge belt.

"Considering that you are a dead shot I think we are a match for the rascals as we stand. However, the easiest way is the best. I would much prefer that we made our escape without shedding any blood."

While they conversed they also did not forget to peer frequently through the interstices of the bushes in order to keep track of anything that transpired in the open space in front.

Suddenly Suzanne grasped Paul by the sleeve of his jacket.

"Look," she said. "There is Noach."

Paul and Toby followed with their eyes the direction she pointed, and saw the rascal making his way down the rocks at the further end of the pocket.

"He must have been on the watch at that opening yonder," said Paul.

He came on slowly, as if time and he were on easy terms, and when he reached the wagon he sat down and punched Kettler into wakefulness.

They conversed together.

Kettler finally got up and looked around, as if in search of Murdock.

Not seeing any sign of him he sat down again, and the rascals continued to talk together for perhaps a quarter of an hour.

Then Noach rose to his feet, came around to the front of the wagon, stepped up on the seat and looked into the van.

Of course he immediately discovered the absence of the prisoners, and sprang down again in a hurry.

From the way he addressed his comrade it was evident he was blaming him for lack of vigilance.

No time, however, was lost by them in making an effort to recover the fugitives.

After glancing sharply all over the grass-covered pocket Noach started for the defile, while Kettler remained beside the wagon on the alert.

"It's too bad that both of them didn't go off through the pass hunting for us," said Paul. "Then we'd have had the chance to sneak across to that opening over the rocks. Though I suppose that would mean I'd have had to abandon my horse, which is tethered in a grove of trees at the other side of the valley beyond the defile."

At that moment Toby uttered a loud exclamation of terror, and pointed to Suzanne's feet.

A good-sized, deadly-looking snake lay coiled there, its flat head poised and gently waving to and fro as if in the act of springing on the girl.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT PAUL FOUND IN THE SPUR OF THE RANGE.

Paul saw Suzanne's danger, and on the spur of the moment he seized his revolver and fired at the snake's head, killing the reptile instantly.

The report of the weapon naturally startled Kettler, and drew his attention in that direction.

He saw the white smoke rising from the fringe of bushes and he became greatly excited.

His first impression was that the pocket had been invaded by their enemies, and that he had been fired upon, so he hastily jumped behind the shelter of the wagon to get out of range.

He felt that his position was desperate, as he had no weapon to defend himself with—the only guns the party possessed being the deputy sheriff's stolen revolvers, now in possession of Murdock and Noach.

"The fat is in the fire now," said Paul, ruefully. "No use staying here any longer. Let's make a break for that rascal and put him out of business while we have the chance. If he has a revolver, and draws it on us, don't hesitate to shoot him, Suzanne."

Paul sprang from the bushes, pistol in hand, followed by Suzanne with her rifle ready for instant service, while

Toby, being neither armed nor very valiant, followed more leisurely, and with many misgivings as to what was about to happen.

"You go around the other side of the wagon, Suzanne, and cut him off that way while I take him in front," said Paul.

Kettler being caught at a disadvantage threw up his hands when so ordered by Paul.

"Here, Toby," ordered his business associate, "see if you can find some pieces of rope in the wagon to tie this fellow with."

Toby hastened to get the cords which the rascals had used to bind himself and Suzanne.

While Paul and Suzanne covered the discomfited scoundrel, the fat boy bound his hands behind his back and tied his legs together.

He had scarcely completed the job when Murdock and Noach, who had heard the report of the revolver, came on the scene, weapons in hand.

They stopped at the mouth of the defile to take a hasty survey of the pocket in order to determine the trouble, and it was not many moments before they grew wise to the situation.

They recognized Paul Scott at once, and at the same time saw their late prisoners.

As there was nothing very formidable in the appearance of these three young people, Murdock and Noach concluded that they could easily overpower them.

So they rushed forward with shouts of triumph, both of them firing at Paul as he stood out in full view.

One of the bullets carried away a lock of the boy's hair, and he staggered back and slipped to the ground.

Suzanne, with a cry of anger and distress, covered Noach in a twinkling with her rifle and pulled the trigger.

Simultaneous with the sharp crack of the weapon the scoundrel threw up his hands, uttered a terrible cry and fell forward on his face.

A second report followed an instant later and Murdock went down on the grass like a stricken deer.

By that time Paul was picking himself up.

Suzanne dropped her rifle and ran to him with the deepest concern on her face.

"Are you hurt?" she asked, with trembling lips.

"Not in the least," he replied, with a reassuring smile. "The ball glanced alongside my head and knocked me out for the moment, but that is all it amounted to."

Then as he looked at the fallen rascals a dozen yards away he exclaimed:

"You shot them both, did you? I wonder if they're dead."

He walked up to Noach and Murdock and examined them.

Each had a streak of blood flowing from a furrow over the left ear.

They had been stunned, but not dangerously wounded.

"I'm rather glad she did not kill them, though they richly deserved such a fate," he said to himself. "I am

sure Suzanne would not like to have their blood on her hands if she could avoid it. She couldn't have made two prettier shots, both exactly alike, without actually killing them."

He returned to the girl's side and reported the facts.

"I did not try to kill them," she said. "I could easily have done that. I hit them just as I meant to do."

"You did all that was necessary to put them in our power," replied Paul, quite pleased with the results of the encounter. "Come, Toby, help me secure those villains before they recover their senses."

There was no more rope, so Paul tore one of the blankets into strips and used that to bind Murdock and Noach hand and foot.

The three bandits were then hoisted into the van like three sacks of meal, Anna Maria was harnessed to the shafts, and with Toby for driver, and Suzanne sitting by his side, the wagon started off through the defile for the valley beyond, Paul riding behind on the deputy sheriff's stolen horse.

After passing through the defile Paul directed Toby to follow him, and he started off ahead for the place where his own animal was picketed.

It was well along in the afternoon, and as both Suzanne and Toby were about half famished, for the bandits had secured only a limited quantity of food, Paul called a halt for an early supper, which he supplied from the eatables he had brought with him.

"Eat heartily, Toby," grinned Paul, handing his young associate a couple of meat sandwiches, after he had first waited on Suzanne. "I guess I have enough to fill you up."

"I hope you have," gurgled Toby, between huge bites. "I feel as hollow as a tube. I've eaten scarcely anything since yesterday morning."

"Well, when we get back to San Bruno you shall have the biggest pie I can buy."

Toby smacked his lips in anticipation of such a feast and finished the last morsel of the two sandwiches.

"More?" he asked, holding out his hand.

"You're a second edition of Oliver Twist, aren't you?" said Paul, producing a couple of additional sandwiches.

Toby had no idea who Oliver Twist was, as he had never read the story, so he merely grinned, and bit into his third sandwich.

When the meal was ended, Paul mounted his horse, and, leading the other animal, headed the procession up the valley.

They reached the upper end of the valley about dark and halted there for the night, the young people, with a blanket apiece, making themselves as comfortable as they could under the shadow of a spur of the hills.

Toby and Suzanne were soon asleep, but Paul felt unusually wakeful.

He lay on his back, looking up at the brilliant stars, and thought how delighted the old hermit would be when he returned Suzanne to her home on the following day.

"He's a queer old fellow," mused the boy; "but he's got

one good streak in him—he's mighty fond of his niece. I wonder how he made all that money he's got in that brass-bound box? There must be thousands of dollars there. It's a fine thing to have plenty of money. A fellow can have anything he wants then. It will take me a good while to make a fortune selling patent medicine. Still, I'm doing pretty well for a chap of my years. I have no right to kick. All the same, I wouldn't mind if I could find a gold mine, and branch out as a young multi-millionaire. I think I'd start a pie bakery especially to provide Toby with enough of his favorite luxury. Dear me, how that boy can eat! If he keeps on he'll burst some day, or grow so big I'll have to hire him out to a side-show."

He turned over on his side and began listlessly to pile up the pebbles within reach, thinking that before he had finished the operation he would drop asleep.

The moon rose over the summit of the range and shone down upon the silent little camp.

Presently, as Paul was putting the finishing touches to his pile of stones, something bright in the face of the rock a short distance away attracted his notice.

"I wonder what that is?" he thought, stopping in his occupation. "It looks uncommonly shiny, and different from the rest of the rock. I'm going over to investigate it."

He got up and walked over to the rock spur on which the rays of the moon shone with a soft brilliancy.

That one particular spot reflected a dull radiance different from any other part of the rocks.

Paul rubbed his hand over it.

"It's a funny piece of rock," he mused. "I'm going to dig it out as a curiosity."

That was easier said than done.

With the point of his bowie knife he dug away at it, and finally quite a chunk of the shiny rock came away in his hand.

He examined it in the light of the moon.

"I wonder if that could be real silver ore?" he asked himself, as he turned it over and over in his fingers. "It looks something like the specks I've seen in silver quartz; but this is not quartz, that I can see; it seems a solid lump of silver rock. I dare say there is more of it in that spur. If it's real silver I've accidentally struck a good thing—maybe a bonanza. If it isn't silver, why, then, this hunk hasn't any value. I must get some person who has an expert knowledge of ores to pass judgment on it. If there's anything in this I can easily find this place again."

Paul dropped the lump of rock in his jacket pocket, went back to his blanket, and while thinking over the possibilities of his discovery fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW PAUL'S DISCOVERY PROMISES VALUABLE RESULTS.

Paul was up with the sun next morning, and the first thing he did was to take a look at his prisoners.

Murdock and Noach had recovered their senses, and from the vigorous way they showered threats on his head the boy judged they were not much inconvenienced by their wounds.

"We'll make you wish you were never born, you young imp, when we get our hands on you again," snarled Murdock, with a vengeful look in his fierce eyes.

"You won't have that pleasure, I'm thinking," replied Paul, coolly.

"The bolts and bars ain't made that'll hold us," roared the leader of the bandits, menacingly.

"I'm willing to take a chance on that," returned the boy. "Smarter fellows than you are in jail, and likely to stay there. You won't have another chance to saw yourselves out of the lock-up."

"We've got friends on the outside that'll take care of us."

"I don't believe a word of that. If you had friends you'd have been better armed and provided for than we found you. You only had one horse and a pair of revolvers, and those you stole from the deputy-sheriff of San Bruno. You've got nerve enough, and you're bad enough, to do 'most anything; but the authorities at San Bruno will keep a better watch on you this time, I'll bet. When they land you in San Luis you'll be safe enough, I guess."

Murdock received this speech with a volley of expletives.

Paul was disgusted and left them to themselves.

After a light breakfast, in which the rascals did not participate, as Paul did not care to take the chance of unloosening even one of their hands, the journey to San Bruno was resumed.

Paul picked out an easier route than that taken by the bandits on the way to the heart of the range, and about the middle of the afternoon they came in sight of the town and the great ocean beyond.

When they drove up to the office of the jailer alongside of the jail, a crowd immediately collected.

He found that the deputy-sheriff was absent with a posse on a still hunt for the escaped prisoners.

The jailer was the most surprised man in town when Paul notified him that he had the three rascals in the van ready for delivery to him.

"Why, when did you go out after them, and who went with you?"

"I went alone the day before yesterday."

"You went alone! Oh, come now, what are you giving me?" replied the jailer, incredulously.

"I'm giving you nothing but the truth. You know I reported to you that my wagon and my assistant were missing, don't you?"

The man nodded.

"Well, I discovered that the bandits had taken the van, carrying off not only my helper but Suzanne Norwood, old Matthew Scraggs's niece."

"What!" exclaimed the jailer. "They carried off the hermit's niece?"

"That's what they did."

"This is the first I've heard about it."

"Mr. Scraggs did not report the matter for reasons he considered good. However, to continue with the facts, I started off on my own hook to see if I could find any trace of the villains, and I succeeded in tracking them to their new hiding place."

"You did!" ejaculated the surprised official.

"I did. I hardly expected to do anything with these fellows. My plan was to aid Miss Norwood and my associate to escape at the first chance, when the rascals happened to be off their guard. This scheme missed fire on the lines originally intended, but it led to a fight with the villains, the upshot of which was we captured the three of them, and I am now ready to deliver them to you."

"I hate to say that I doubt your story," replied the jailer, jumping to his feet and calling two of his assistants; "but when I see the rascals with my own eyes I'll be convinced."

"Then come outside, and you'll see them all right."

In one minute the jailer had evidence enough to banish his disbelief.

He was tickled to death at getting his slippery prisoners back again, and you may be sure he lost no time in hustling them back into the prison.

After that he took no further chances with them, but posted a guard outside the window until the return of the deputy sheriff from his unsuccessful expedition, when the bandits were taken under a strong guard to San Luis, and lodged in a strong jail.

In spite of Murdock's boasting, they did not escape a second time, but after being tried and convicted were sent to the State prison for fifteen years apiece.

In recognition of Paul's services in achieving their recapture, the town of San Bruno voted him a reward of \$300, while the county presented him with the standing reward of \$2,000 for their capture.

It was dark, on the day that Paul returned with his prisoners to San Bruno, before the tide was low enough for him to accompany Suzanne back to the cove.

"Poor Uncle Matthew," said Suzanne, as they came in sight of the light burning in the cabin window. "He is suffering a world of anxiety on my account. How happy he'll be to have me back again!"

"It will be something of a surprise to him to see you back so soon," said Paul. "I left him in a hopeful frame of mind, but I have no doubt he has since had misgivings of the ultimate success of my little expedition."

They ascended the path in the rocks and Paul knocked lustily on the door.

"Who is there?" asked the old hermit, after a moment's delay.

"Paul Scott," replied the boy.

The door was quickly unbarred and unchained.

As it swung open on its heavy hinges, Paul was surprised to see the great change which had come over Matthew Scraggs in the short time since he saw him last. He seemed to have aged ten years.

His straggling hairs looked whiter than ever, and his

deep-set eyes burned like coals of living fire far back under his shaggy, overreaching eyebrows.

He looked thinner than ever, for he had scarcely eaten anything to speak of since the morning he received Murdock's letter and understood the peril which threatened Suzanne.

"You are back, Paul Scott," he said in a hollow voice, which had a strangely pathetic ring in it. "You have failed then to find my little sunbeam—my Suzanne. I feared you would not succeed. Those rascals are too clever to be easily outwitted. To-morrow I will take the money to the spindle rock and——"

"You will do nothing of the sort, Mr. Scraggs," replied Paul. "Suzanne is safe and those bandits are in jail."

"Suzanne safe!" he gasped in a fluttering voice. "Are you telling me the truth, Paul Scott?" he asked with plaintive eagerness.

"Yes."

"Then where is she? Where is my little girl?"

Suzanne, who had been standing back in the shadows while Paul was breaking the news to the old man, could curb her impatience no longer.

"Here, uncle. Here I am, safe and uninjured," and she darted forward and sprang into his arms.

Paul stepped into the cabin after her and closed the door.

The old hermit was well nigh overcome by the unexpected reappearance of his niece, whom he loved so dearly, and whose absence under such terrible circumstances had been a sore trial to him.

He seemed hardly to believe the evidence of his eyes, and looked at her in a dazed kind of way.

But the pressure of her warm lips to his, and the twining hold of her arms around his neck, soon brought conviction to his senses, and he caressed her fondly, and thanked heaven that she had been restored to him.

"And did Paul Scott save you, my little one? Am I to thank him for this great blessing which has come to me to-night?"

"Yes, uncle. He tracked his wagon, in which those bandits carried us off, far into the wilds of the range. His friend Toby was also in the power of those men. We made up our minds to try and escape from them yesterday when we thought we saw a chance. But we surely would have been recaptured but for Paul. He deserves all your thanks, uncle. I shall never forget how good and brave he was to come to my rescue."

The old man at once turned to Paul and expressed his gratitude in heartfelt language.

"That's all right," replied the boy. "We'll let it go at that. I did the best I knew how to save Suzanne, and I feel sufficiently repaid in knowing that I succeeded. I don't care to be praised in doing what was scarcely more than my duty."

Paul accepted an invitation to stay there that night.

In fact he had no other course, as the tide had by this time cut off the passage around the point.

Suzanne immediately started in to prepare supper, which

was not very extensive, as the hermit had very little of anything to eat in the cabin.

However, they made the best of the situation, and as the girl was about fagged out, she went to her room as soon as the meal was disposed of.

Before Paul spread the blanket which was given him to make a bed of, he thought about the silver-looking stone in his pocket, and drawing it out showed it to Matthew Scraggs.

He examined it attentively.

"Where did you find this?" asked the old man finally, in a tone that fairly trembled with eagerness, as he looked into the boy's face.

"In a certain part of the mountains through which we passed. Do you think it can possibly be real silver?"

"Do I think? Why, Paul Scott, it is silver. A chunk of the pure virgin metal."

"Do you mean that, Mr. Scraggs? Are you certain you are not making a mistake?"

"I am making no mistake. I am thoroughly familiar with metallurgy. This specimen is genuine silver ore. There must be more, tons of it, where you found this. Lose no time, but go back and stake out a claim. Stay, I will go with you and show you how to do it. We must comply with the law, and yet take full advantage of our rights. The discovery is yours, and I will see that so far as my knowledge of surface indications will decide that the cream of this lode shall come to you. After that it is only right that Suzanne and I and your associate should have the preference over strangers, who will flock to the spot as soon as the news of this silver find becomes known. Am I not right?"

"You are, Mr. Scraggs."

Thus the matter was settled, and Paul retired to rest, an excited and happy boy.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SILVER LODE.

When Paul awoke next morning and went outside to take a whiff of the bracing sea air he found Matthew Scraggs seated before a flat rock cleaning a mess of fish he had just caught.

"You look as if you had slept well, Paul Scott, in spite of the hardness of your bed," remarked the old man cheerfully.

"Like a top," grinned the boy. "Though I must admit that I dreamed I found a mine of solid silver ore, the like of which no man ever heard of."

"Your dream is likely to come true, for that chunk of virgin silver you showed me last night tells its own story. You said you broke that off from the face of the rock."

"I did, night before last, and I am ready to lead you to the spot and point out the place where I dug it out with my bowie."

"It must be a lode of uncommon richness to produce so remarkable a specimen."

"I hope it is. A fellow doesn't get more than one such chance in a lifetime."

"It is only the favored few who even get the one chance. On the strength of that specimen I should say that your fortune is made. I have lived many years in this part of the State, and never before have I heard that silver had been found in that range. Strange that you should be the first to bring the ore to light."

"Oh, I don't know about that, Mr. Scraggs. If it is really there somebody had to make the discovery. Why not I as well as any one else?"

"True. Are you ready to start to-day for that particular spot in the range where you found the specimen?"

"I am ready any time you are, Mr. Scraggs."

"Then you and I will provide ourselves with shovels and picks, and a week's supply of provisions, and go there alone. Your friend Toby can remain here with Suzanne and keep her company while we are away."

"We will travel in the van, I suppose?"

"Yes. Then we can bring away a quantity of the ore which we can have assayed in San Luis."

"All right. As soon as I can get out of the cove I will make all necessary preparations for the trip, and will drive up to the other side of the point for you. I suppose I can leave my stock of patent remedies here, as it would be foolish to carry the stuff with us."

"There is a small cave in the rocks down on the beach where you can store your stuff for the present. It will be quite safe there. But if our expedition pans out as I fancy it will, I don't think you'll have any further use for your stock in trade."

The old man took up the fish and carried them into the cabin, where Suzanne was already up and stirring about, making preparations for breakfast.

An hour after the meal the tide had receded far enough to enable Paul to walk around the point.

He found Toby eagerly looking for his own breakfast.

Hitching Anna Maria to the wagon he first took Toby to the hotel, and then drove to a hardware store, where he purchased the necessary implements for their surface mining operations.

Then he laid in a stock of provisions, with a few necessary cooking utensils.

After that he drove back to the hotel and found the fat boy waiting for him outside.

"Jump up, Toby," said Paul. "You're going to spend a few days at the cove with Suzanne. Her uncle and I are going off into the country on business."

"I don't mind," replied the fat boy; "but I hope you won't forget to buy me a half dozen nice, juicy pies."

"Will half a dozen be enough for you?" grinned Paul.

"Surely it will if you do not stay away longer than a week."

"I will get you the pies at a bakery down the street.

From the quantity of pies you consume you ought to be a very pie-ous boy," chuckled Paul.

"More likely from the rate I eat pies that I should turn a pie-rate," snickered Toby.

"You'd make a healthy-looking pirate, Toby. If I kept a restaurant I'd hire you to carry the banner. I think your appearance would draw custom."

The van drew up near the point, and Paul's trunk and the boxes of cough mixture and salve were transferred to the cave.

Then the old hermit and Suzanne appeared.

"So you and Uncle Matthew are going off into the wilderness somewhere, are you?" she said laughingly to Paul.

"We are bound on a voyage of discovery, Miss Suzanne," grinned the boy.

"I suppose there isn't any use of my asking where you are going? I asked uncle, but he wouldn't gratify my curiosity. He is too provokingly mysterious," she added with a pout.

"You shall know all about it when we come back," replied Paul. "I'm going to leave Toby in your charge. I hope you will see that he doesn't overeat himself. I'd advise you to lock those half-dozen pies up, and give him only half of one each day."

"Oh, lor'!" gasped the fat boy. "Don't do that."

"Don't worry, Toby," laughed Suzanne. "I'll see that you sha'n't suffer."

"If you spoil him while I'm gone, Miss Suzanne, I'll hold you responsible," said Paul.

The girl laughed and Toby grinned, then Paul and the hermit got on the seat of the van, bade Suzanne and the fat youth good-by, and drove off toward the mountain range.

Paul and Matthew Scraggs arrived at their destination about dark that day.

Next morning after they had made a hasty meal the boy led the old man to the place in the rock spur where he had chipped out the chunk of silver ore.

Scraggs made a careful examination of the spur, and at length announced that the rocks were alive with silver quartz.

"This is the outcropping of a bonanza lode which seems to run straight into this mountain. I see enough ore in sight to make you rich. We will now proceed to mark out your claim according to legal requirements, then we will dig out a quantity of the stuff at different places which we will take to San Luis and have assayed in order to determine its richness. This valley will soon be peopled with prospectors, many of whom will naturally profit by your discovery."

"Well, we can take up four claims, at any rate, and what is left can go to the public," said Paul.

The boundaries of the four claims were accordingly properly defined.

It was subsequently decided that the four should be pooled, and that Paul should be entitled to three-fifths of the results obtained from the claims, and that the hermit,

Suzanne and Toby should divide the other two-fifths among them.

That afternoon Paul and Matthew Scraggs attacked the spur with pick and shovel, and obtained specimens of silver ore that promised to assay several thousand dollars to the ton.

"As far as I can determine," said the old man, "this ledge shows phenomenal values. The high-grade streak runs here, starting at the foot-wall of the vein. It is several inches wide wherever we have dug into it, and I should say roughly it ought to easily yield \$15,000 to \$18,000 to the ton. There is another streak over here," continued Mr. Scraggs, jabbing his pick into the rock, "that seems to be twelve or fourteen inches wide which we will investigate further to-morrow. It is unusual to uncover such rich values right on the surface, and is due to the unusual conformation of the mountain at this point."

They desisted from further work for the day, and spent the remaining hours of the afternoon figuring upon the probably value of the lode, and the best method of turning the rock-imprisoned silver ore into real money.

That night Paul dreamed that the cove was piled high with brass-bound boxes filled with silver dollars, and that every one of them belonged to him.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH A ROLLING STONE AT LAST BECOMES STATIONARY.

Paul and Matthew Scraggs spent the greater part of a week investigating the silver lode, and then with the van well filled with marked specimens of the quartz they started for San Luis.

These specimens were left at the assay office, and the results awaited with intense interest by Paul.

As for the old hermit, he had no doubts about the great value of the boy's discovery.

He had been a prospector in his day, and his judgment could be depended on.

The two took up their quarters at the hotel Paul and Toby had patronized for their meals when they were in the town two weeks before.

They had nothing to do but wait for the report of the assay office.

"By the way, Mr. Scraggs," said Paul on the afternoon of their arrival in town, "do you mind telling me why you went to live in such a lonesome place as the cove?"

The question seemed to startle the old man at first, and he regarded the boy for some moments intently, as if considering whether he would gratify the young fellow's curiosity.

"I went to live there," he replied at last, "because I wanted to withdraw myself as far as possible from association with the world."

"If that was your object you couldn't have selected a

better spot to live unless you had gone to some uninhabited island."

"I found nothing but knavery and ingratitude in the world," went on the old man, "and I grew tired of it all. I had the cabin built upon those rocks, though the people of San Bruno were not slow in saying I was crazy to select such a place for a habitation. I let them talk, for my likes and dislikes were my own, and for their opinion I cared nothing. Still I did not seek to antagonize them, and after I came into possession of that chest of money I made many presents to the Church, for I feared that some time an attempt might be made to rob me, and I wanted to rely on the San Bruno authorities for help in case I required it. I arranged that system of signals—a smoke rocket by day, a fire rocket by night—to notify the town when I was in danger or in trouble."

"It is a great scheme," answered Paul.

"I gradually became known as the hermit of San Bruno, and to this title was added that of miser, not because any one knew that I had much money, but because it suited the whim of the people to call me so. Aside from Suzanne, you and those three bandits are the only persons who have actually seen that chest and its contents. I dare say you wonder how I came into possession of so much money."

"I'm not worrying about it, Mr. Scraggs. It's none of my business how you got it. I am sure you came by it honestly, for you don't look like a man who would be guilty of a crime."

"I thank you for your good opinion, Paul Scott. You're a good, straightforward boy, after my own heart. I feel that you are one of the few I have met in this world who are worthy of trust. An honest and true man is one of the noblest works of God—and the scarcest. I believe you will grow up to be such, and for that reason I value your acquaintance, and thoroughly trust you. For that reason I rejoice that you have discovered this silver lode, for you will not squander its value in a thousand and one foolish ways, like so many are prone to do."

"I hope not, Mr. Scraggs."

"The money I have—and there is thirty thousand dollars in gold and silver coin in that brass-bound box—would bring me many luxuries if I yearned for such; but its possession is the only luxury I crave for. I love to handle it; to count and recount it at my leisure; and to dream what it will some day do for Suzanne when I am dead and gone. The possession of that money alone makes me feel at ease concerning her future. I believe that heaven sent it to me for her sake."

"Then you did not earn it yourself?"

"No. I have owned many times that amount at various times in my life, but I have lost every dollar. I have been remorselessly robbed right and left by men in whom I reposed implicit faith, and that is the reason why the world and I came to fall out."

"If you've been swindled as you say, I don't wonder that you soured on the world. I'd hate to be skinned myself."

"That chest of money came to me in a strange way," went on the old man, with a far-away look in his eyes.

"A strange way?"

"Yes. I had been living at the cove for perhaps a year. Suzanne was not with me at the time. One night a storm raged along the coast. I afterwards heard some of the people of San Bruno say it was the worst in the memory of the oldest inhabitant. At any rate a good-sized ship went ashore right on the rocks in front of my cabin. She broke up there, and disappeared piece by piece until there was nothing left of her but a lot of wreckage. Two days after the storm, when the sea had become calm once more, I went fishing as was my custom among those rocks, and then it was that I found that brass-bound box jammed into a crevice near the shore. I could not move it as it stood—it was too heavy. Singularly to say, a key was in the lock, so I had no difficulty in opening it. Then I discovered that it was full of coined money. I lost no time, you may guess, in carrying its contents up to the cabin, and then when the chest was empty I had little trouble in conveying that up the rocky path to my dwelling. The identity of the lost vessel was never discovered, and the money consequently became honestly mine. Soon afterward my only sister, who was living in Los Angeles, died, and her child, Suzanne, was thrown upon the world. I at once took her to the cabin, and she has ever since lived with me."

"She is a fine girl, all right," said Paul enthusiastically.

"She is the apple of my eye," replied the old man, fervently.

Two days later they got the report of the assay office, and it bore out Matthew Scragg's estimates almost to the letter.

Paul, after a consultation with the hermit, decided to go to Los Angeles and form a company to work the four claims.

Of course, as soon as the news got out, as it did almost immediately, there was a rush of prospectors to the San Luis mountains, and the reports that came back set mining speculators by the ears.

Paul had a dozen offers for his rights, one syndicate offering him a million dollars in cash.

He declined to accept the offer, and found no difficulty in forming the company he had in view, which he called the San Luis Mining and Milling Company, which he capitalized at \$10,000,000.

While Paul had himself elected as president of the enterprise, he persuaded Mr. Scraggs to assume the management of the company.

He sold only a small quantity of the stock at a good figure, and with the money the hermit advanced they began operations.

A score of other companies sprang into existence at the same time, taking up claims all around the San Luis company's holdings.

Tunnels were built and shafts were sunk.

A few of the companies panned out results after great outlay.

Paul's company was the only one that had easy sailing from the start, for many hundreds of tons of rich ore lay on and close to the surface of his claims, and he was able to begin shipments at once.

Finally the syndicate which had made him the original offer of \$1,000,000 for the whole thing submitted another offer of \$5,000,000, and this, on the hermit's advice, he accepted.

Two millions of this amount was divided between Matthew Scraggs, Suzanne and Toby, as originally arranged.

As for Paul himself, he found himself a millionaire three times over.

A large trust company in Los Angeles became guardian for Paul and Toby until they attained their majority, while Matthew Scraggs had himself legally appointed in a similar capacity for Suzanne.

A few months ago Paul reached his twenty-first birthday, and he celebrated the occasion by uniting himself in marriage to Suzanne Norwood, when the old hermit bestowed his blessing and his share of the San Luis Mining Company's profits on the bride, retaining only the money in the old brass-bound chest at the cabin, where he still lives at a hale and hearty age.

Paul embarked in a large business venture soon after his marriage, and Toby Titmarsh is his right-hand assistant and companion.

He may now be considered as permanently settled for life, rich, prosperous and happy, but for all that he still retains a pleasant recollection of the days when he first met his young wife under such thrilling circumstances and when he was only A ROLLING STONE.

THE END.

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